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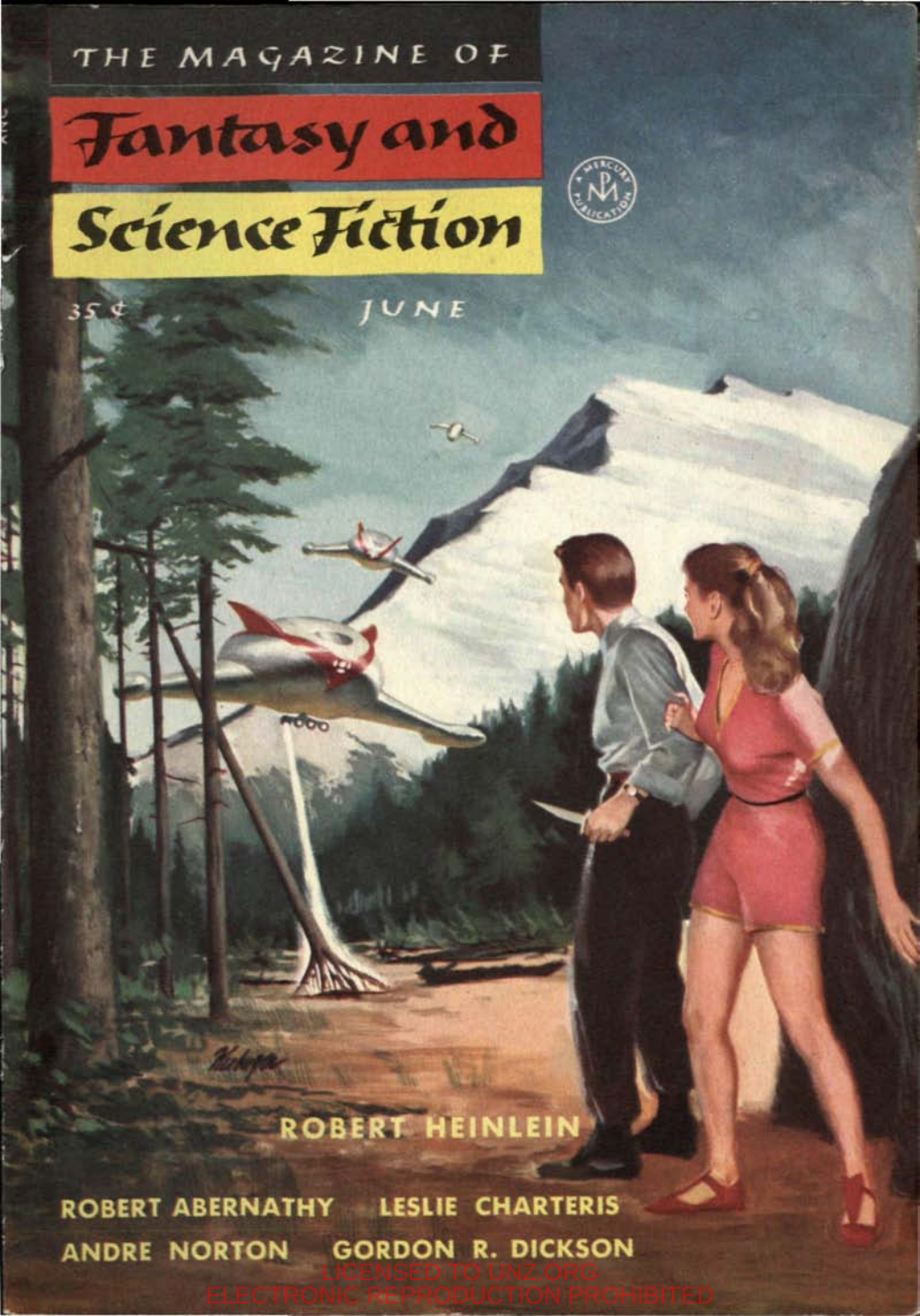

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 6, No. 6 JUNE

Heirs Apparent (*short novelet*) *by* ROBERT ABERNATHY 3

Miss Prinks *by* GORDON R. DICKSON 22

Time Payment *by* MICHAEL SHAARA 33

Fish Story *by* LESLIE CHARTERIS 37

Mousetrap *by* ANDRE NORTON 47

Warrior in Darkness *by* LEVI CROW 53

Recommended Reading *by* THE EDITORS 69

Mint, in d/j *by* RUTH LAURA WAINWRIGHT 73

Star Lummox (*second of three parts*) *by* ROBERT A. HEINLEIN 79

Visitors from Venus *by* T. S. WATT 124

Index to Volume 6 127

Cover by Kirberger
(from Star Lummox, by Robert A. Heinlein)

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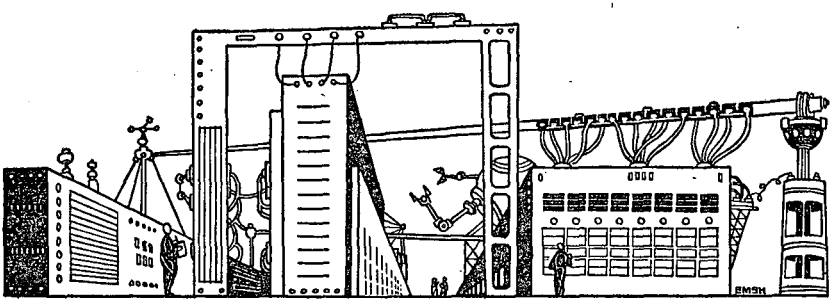

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History, despite the pretensions of some historians, is hardly an exact science — and perhaps for that very reason, it furnishes an unusually fascinating basis for speculative science fiction, for the logical intuition of a good fiction writer may provide conclusions as valuable as those of the academic scientist. Here is a new and frighteningly convincing aftermath of a Russo-American war, developed with an acute understanding of the people of both countries. Most Russians in current fiction are merely fashionably villainous straw men, constructed in complete ignorance of Russian culture and mores — as were the Germans in fiction of a dozen years ago. (We are often amused to read stories of the 1940's reprinted now with the black-hearted Nazis revised as black-hearted Communists to fit the current style in villains.) But Robert Abernathy, who holds a Ph.D. from Harvard in Slavic, has endeavored to portray a Russian who, according to the lights of his own culture, is a hero — in conflict with a representative American . . . and with a third force which lurks in history as heir to both warring civilizations.

Heirs Apparent

by ROBERT ABERNATHY

WARILY CROUCHING, Bogomazov moved forward up the gentle slope. Above his head the high steppe-grass, the *kovýl'*, nodded its plumes in the chilly wind. He shivered.

All at once the wind brought again the wood-smoke smell, and his nostrils flared like a hunting animal's. With sudden recklessness he rose to his full height and looked eagerly across the grasslands that sloped to the river.

Down yonder, hugging the river bank among scanty trees, was a cluster of crudely and newly built thatched huts. Bogomazov's hunger-keen eyes were quick to note the corral that held a few head of cattle, the pens that must mean poultry, as well as the brown swatches of plowed fields. The wanderer licked his lips, and his hand, almost of itself, unbuttoned the holster at his hip and loosened the pistol there.

But he controlled his urge to plunge ahead; he sank down to concealment in the grass again, and his tactician's glance swept over the scene, studying approaches, seeking human figures, signs of guards and readiness. He saw

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none, but still he did not move; only the habit of extreme caution had kept him alive this long and enabled him to travel a thousand miles across the chaos that had been Russia.

Presently two small figures emerged from one of the huts and went unhurriedly to the chicken-pens, were busy there for a time, and returned. Bogomazov relaxed; it was almost certain now that he had not been seen. At last he obeyed his rumbling stomach and resumed his advance, though indirectly so as to take advantage of the terrain, stalking the village.

He was a strange, skulking figure — Nikolai Nikolayevich Bogomazov, onetime Colonel of the Red Army and Hero of the Soviet Union; now ragged and half-naked, face concealed by a scraggly growth of beard, hair slashed awkwardly short across the forehead to prevent its falling into his eyes. His shoes had gone to pieces long ago and the rags he had wrapped around his feet in their place had worn through, leaving him barefoot; he did not know how to make shoes of bark, peasant-style. His army trousers flapped in shreds around his bony shanks. The torn khaki shirt he wore was of American manufacture, a trophy of the great offensive two years earlier that had carried the Russian armies halfway across Europe and through the Near East into Africa . . . those had been the great days: before the bitter realization that it would never be enough to defeat Western armies; after the destruction of the great cities and industries, to be sure, but before the really heavy bombardments had begun. . . .

Bogomazov wormed his way forward, mouth watering, thinking of chickens.

He was close enough to his objective to hear contented poultry-noises, and was thinking of how best to deal with the plaited reeds of the enclosure, when a voice behind him cried startledly, "*Oho!*"

The stalker instinctively rolled to one side, his pistol in his hand; then he saw that the man who had shouted was some yards away and backing nervously toward the nearby hovels — a stocky, shabby figure, broad face richly bearded; most important, he had no weapon. Bogomazov came to a quick decision; sheathing his gun, he got to his feet and called sharply, "Halt!"

The other froze at the tone of command, and stared sullenly at the armed scarecrow confronting him. Farther off a door banged and there were footsteps hurrying nearer. Bogomazov watched without a tremor as a half-dozen other men and boys approached and stopped beside the first man, as if he stood on an invisible line. A couple of them carried rifles, but the lone interloper did not flinch. Not for the first time, he was gambling everything on a bluff. And these were merely peasants.

"What place is this?" he demanded in the same crisp voice of authority.

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"Novoselye," one answered hesitantly. "The New Settlement."

"I can see as much. Who is responsible here?"

"Wait a minute," rumbled the big bearded man who had first spotted him. "How about telling us who you are and what you want?" He shuffled uneasily from one foot to another as the stranger's cold eyes raked him, but succeeded in maintaining a half-hearted air of defiance.

"My name doesn't matter for the present," said Bogomazov slowly. "What does matter is that I am a Communist."

He felt and saw the stiffening, the electric rise of tension, the furtive crawling look that came into the score of eyes upon him; and outwardly Bogomazov was cool, relaxed, but inwardly he was like a coiled spring. His hand hovered unobtrusively close to the pistol butt.

This was the die-cast. He knew personally of too many cases of Communists beaten, assassinated, lynched by those who should have followed their orders, during the storm of madness and despair on the heels of the great disasters, the storm that still went on. . . . Bogomazov had been too clever to be caught, just as he had been clever enough to realize in time, when three months ago the total breakdown of the civil authority had commenced to envelop the military as well, that in the North where he then was the Northern winter now setting in would finish what the bombardments had begun. A thousand miles of southward trek lay behind him — from the lands where the blizzards would soon sweep in from Asia to blanket the blackened relics of the Old and New Russias, where the River Moskvá was making a new marsh of the immense shallow depression that had been the site of Moscow, where scarcely a dead tree, let alone a building, stood on all the plain that had once been ruled by Great Novgorod and greater Leningrad.

The man with the beard said warily, "What do you want of us . . . Comrade?"

Bogomazov let out his breath in an inaudible sigh. He said curtly, "Are there any Communists among you?"

"No, Comrade."

"Then who is responsible?"

They looked at one another uneasily. The spokesman gulped and stammered, "The . . . the American is responsible."

Bogomazov's composure was sorely tested. He frowned searchingly at the speaker, "You said — *amerikanets?*"

"*Da, tovarishch.*"

Bogomazov took a deep breath and two steps toward them. "All right. Take me to this American . . . at once!"

The peasants faltered briefly, then moved to obey. As Bogomazov strode

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up the straggling village street in their midst, he was very much aware that a man with a rifle walked on either side of him — like a guard of honor or a prisoner's escort. Bogomazov left his holster-flap unbuttoned. From the hovels some women and children peered out to watch as they passed; a whisper fluttered from hut to hut: "*Kommunist prishól*. . . ."

They stopped in front of a shed, built roughly like the other buildings, of hand-hewn boards. From inside came a rhythmic clanging of metal, and when Bogomazov stepped boldly through the open doorway he was met by a hot blast of air. A stone forge glowed brightly, and a man turned from it, shirtless and sweating, hammer still raised above an improvised anvil.

As the blacksmith straightened, mopping his forehead, Bogomazov saw at first glance that he was in truth an American or at least a Westerner; he had the typical — and hated — features, the long narrow face and jaw, the prominent nose like the beak of some predatory bird, the lanky loose-jointed build. The Russian word *amerikanets* means not only "American," but also, as a slang expression, "man who gets things done, go-getter"; and it had passed through Bogomazov's mind that these peasants might have applied the term as a fanciful sort of title to some energetic leader risen from among them — but, no: the man before him was really one of the enemy.

With a smooth motion Bogomazov drew and leveled his pistol. He said, "You are under arrest in the name of the Soviet Government."

The other stared at his unkempt menacing figure with a curious grimace, as if he were undecided whether to laugh or cry. The pistol moved in a short, commanding arc; the hammer fell from opened fingers, thuddi[illegible] dully on the earthen floor.

Bogomazov sensed rather than saw the painful uncertainty of the armed men in the doorway; he didn't turn his head. "Keep your hands in sight," he ordered. "Stand over there." The man obeyed carefully; evidently he understood Russian.

"Now," said the Communist, "explain. What kind of infiltration have you been carrying on here?"

The American blinked at him, still wearing that ambiguous expression. He said mildly, his speech fluent though heavily accented, "At the moment when I was so rudely interrupted, I was trying to beat part of a gun-mounting into a plowshare. We put in the fall wheat with the old-style wooden plows; a couple of iron shares will make the spring sowing a lot easier and more rewarding, and we may even be able to break some more land this fall."

"Stop evading! I asked you . . . Wait." Feeling intuitively that the psychological moment had come, Bogomazov gestured brusquely at the men in the doorway. "You may go. I will call when you are needed."

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They shuffled their feet, fingered the rifles they held, and melted away.

The American smiled wryly. "You know how to handle these people, don't you? . . . But I wish you'd quit pointing that gun now. You aren't going to shoot me in any case until after you've questioned me, and I wouldn't advise you to then. I'm not a very good blacksmith, I admit, but I am the only person here who knows anything about farm management . . . unless you happen to be a stray *agronóm*."

The Russian lowered the pistol and caressed its barrel with his other hand, his face expressionless. "Go on," he said. "I begin to see. You are a specialist who has turned his knowledge to account to obtain a position of leadership."

The other sighed. "You might say that, or you might say I was drafted. The original nucleus of this community was two light machine guns — abandoned after all the ammunition was used up in brushes with the *razbóiniki*. This group was footloose then; I persuaded them to strike south, since when winter came they'd have broken up or starved, and look for unblighted land to farm. As for me, I used to work for the United States Department of Agriculture; what I know about tractor maintenance doesn't do much good just now, but some of the rest is still applicable. I realized pretty early — after I walked away by myself from a crash landing near Tula — that my chances of survival alone, as an alien, would be practically zero. . . . My name, incidentally, is Leroy Smith — Smith means *kuznéts*, but I never thought I'd revert so far to type," he added with a glance at the smoldering forge.

"Go on, Smeet," said Bogomazov, still fondling the gun. "What have you accomplished?"

The American gave him a perplexed look. "Well . . . these people here aren't a very choice bunch. About half of them were factory hands — proletarians, you know — who've had to learn from the ground up. The rest were mostly low-grade collective farm workers — fair to mediocre at carrying out the foreman's orders, but lost when it comes to figuring out what to do next. That, of course, is where I come in." He eyed the Russian speculatively. "And you, as a lone survivor, must have talents that Novoselye can use. We ought to be able to make a deal."

"I," said Bogomazov flatly, "am a Communist."

Smith's eyes narrowed. "Oh, oh," he murmured under his breath. "I should have known it — the way he bulled in here, the way —"

"There will be no deal. As a specialist, you are useful. You will continue to be useful. You will remember that you are serving the Soviet State; any irregularity, any sabotage or wrecking activities — *I* will punish." He hefted the pistol.

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The American said wearily, "Don't you realize that the Soviet State, the Communist Party, the war — all that's over and done with, *kapút?* And America too, I suppose — the last I heard our whole industrial triangle was a radioactive bonfire and Washington had been annexed to Chesapeake Bay. Here we're a handful of survivors trying to go on surviving."

"The war is not over. Did you think you could start a war and call it quits when you became nauseated with it?"

"We didn't start it."

In the light of the forge Bogomazov's eyes glittered with a color that matched the metal of the weapon he held. "You capitalists made your fundamental mistake through vulgar materialism. You thought you could destroy Communism by destroying the capital, the wealth and industry and military power we had built up as a base in the Soviet Union. You didn't realize that our real capital was always — ourselves, the Communists. That's why we will inherit the earth, now that your war has shattered the old world!"

Smith watched him talk with a sort of dazed fascination, and then, the spell breaking, smiled faintly. "Before you go about inheriting the earth, it will be necessary to worry about lasting out the winter."

"Naturally!" snapped Bogomazov. He stepped back to the doorway, and called, "You there! Come on in." He singled out one of the armed peasants. "You will stand guard, to see that this foreigner does not escape or commit any acts of sabotage, such as damaging tools. You will not listen to anything he may say. So long as he behaves properly, you will leave him strictly alone, understood?"

The man nodded violently. "Yes, Comrade."

"I am going to inspect the settlement. You, Smeet — back to making plowshares, and they had better be good!"

Winter closed down inexorably. Icy winds blew from the steppe — not the terrible fanged winds of the Northern tundras, but freezing all the same; and on still days the smoke from the huts rose far into the bright frosty air, betraying the village's location to any chance marauders.

There was no help for that, but there was plenty of work to be done. Almost every day the forge was busy, and on the outskirts of Novoselye hammers rang, where new houses were going up to relieve the settlement's crowding. It would have been good to have a stockade, too; but on the almost treeless plain it had become necessary to go dangerously far to find usable timber.

Bogomazov, making one of his frequent circuits of the village in company with Ivanov, his silent and caninely devoted fellow-Communist who

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had strayed in a few weeks after him, halted to watch the construction. The American Smith was lending a hand on the job — at the moment, he had paused to show a former urban clerk how to use a hammer without bending precious nails.

Bogomazov watched for a minute in silence, then called, "Smeet!"

The American looked round, straightened and came toward them without haste. "What is it now?"

"I have been looking for you. Some of the cattle are sick; no one seems to know if it is serious. Do you know anything about veterinary medicine?"

"I've done a little cow-doctoring — I was brought up on a farm. I'll take a look at them right away."

"Good." Watching the other turn to go, Bogomazov felt an uneasy though familiar surprise at the extent to which he and the settlement had come to rely on this outlander. Time and again, in greater or lesser emergencies calling for special skills, the only one who knew what to do — or the only one who would volunteer to try — had been this inevitable Smith.

There was an explanation for that, of course: from Smith's references to his prewar life in America, Bogomazov gathered that he had worked at one time or another at a remarkable variety of "specialties," moving from place to place and from job to job, in the chaotic capitalistic labor market, in a manner which would never have been tolerated in the orderly Soviet economic system. . . . As a result, he seemed to have done a little of everything and to know more than a little about everything.

And Bogomazov was aware that, behind his back, the villagers referred to the foreigner as "Comrade Specialist" — improperly giving him the title of honor, *tovarishch*, though he was not even a Soviet citizen, let alone a Party member. . . .

That train of thought was a reminder, and Bogomazov called, "Wait! Another matter, when you have time . . . I am told that the stove in Citizen Vrachov's hut will not draw."

Smith turned, smiling. "That's all right. Vrachov's wife complained to me about it, and I've already fixed the flue."

Bogomazov stiffened. "She should not have gone to you. She should have reported the matter to me first."

The American's smile faded. "Oh . . . discipline, eh?"

"Discipline is essential," said Bogomazov flatly. Ivanov, at his elbow, nodded emphatic agreement.

"I suppose it is." Smith eyed them thoughtfully. "I've got to admit that you've accomplished some things I probably couldn't have done — like redistributing the housing space and cooking up a system of rationing to take the village through the winter — and making it stick."

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"You could not have done those things because you are not a Communist," said Bogomazov with energy. "You are used to the 'impossibilities' of a dying society; but we are strong in the knowledge that history is on our side. There is nothing that a real Bolshevik cannot achieve!"

Ivanov nodded again.

"History," Smith said reflectively, "is notorious for changing sides. I wonder if even a Bolshevik . . . But in the case of Vrachov's wife's chimney, your discipline seems rather petty."

The Russian drew visibly into himself. "Enough!" he said sharply. "You are to see to the cattle."

Smith shrugged slightly and turned away. "O.K.," he said. "*Volya vasha* — you're the boss."

A half-grown boy bolted headlong down the village street, feet ringing on the frost-hard ground. "*Razbóiniki!*" he shrieked. "*Razbo-o-oiniki!*"

At the feared cry — "Robbers!" — the inhabitants poured out of their dwellings like bees from a threatened hive, some snatching up axes, hoes, even sticks of firewood. No guns — one of Bogomazov's first acts after he had restored the Soviet authority in Novoselye had been to round up all the firearms, a motley collection of Russian and other makes, and store them safely in a stout shed under the protection of the village's only working padlock.

The villagers began to huddle together, hugging the shelter of their houses and staring anxiously eastward, at the farther banks of the frozen river. The boy who had given the alarm ran among them, pointing. Everyone saw the little black figures, men and horses, moving yonder, pacing up and down the snow-covered shore; and a concerted groan went up as one mounted man ventured testingly out onto the ice and, evidently, found it strong enough.

To make things worse, the penned cattle, upset by the tumult, began bawling. That sound would carry clearly across the river, and would whet the appetites of the *razbóiniki*. The Novoselyane shivered, remembering all the tales of villages overrun and burned, the inhabitants driven off or slaughtered, remembering too their own collisions with such troops of marauders — remnants of revolted army units, of mobs that had escaped the cities' ruin, of dispersed Asian tribes — armed riffraff swept randomly together from Heaven knew where, *iz-zá granítsy*, from beyond the frontiers even. . . .

These *razbóiniki* were plainly numerous, and plainly, too, they were coming. Perhaps a hundred men, half of them mounted, were in sight, and on the skyline beyond the river the sharper-sighted glimpsed wagons,

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probably ox-drawn. The enemy were well organized, not merely casual looters. The Novoselyane gripped their improvised weapons — vaguely, frightenedly determined to show fight, but withal no more than sheep for the slaughter. A hulking young ex-factory worker mourned aloud, "*Bozhe moi*, if we only still had the machine guns . . ."

Then Bogomazov came striding down the street, flinging commands right and left as he went, commands that sent the villagers scurrying into an approximation of a defense line. He swore bitterly, wrestling with the frozen padlock on the shed where the guns had been stored; he got it open, and, together with Ivanov, began to run up and down the line passing out rifles and strict orders not to use them until word was given.

The mounted *razbóiniki* were approaching at a walk, in an uneven skirmish line across the ice.

Smith stood watching, hands tucked for warmth — he owned no mittens — into the pockets of the tattered flight jacket he still clung to. As Bogomazov hurried past, cradling a sniper's rifle equipped with telescopic sights, Smith remarked, "I used to be a pretty fair shot —"

"Keep out of the way!" snapped the Communist. He dropped to all fours, crept out onto the open slope beyond the row of houses, and lay sighting carefully. Behind the line Ivanov scurried from point to point, repeating the orders: "Hold your fire, and when you do shoot, aim for the horses in front. They have fewer horses than men; and if an enemy can once be persuaded that the front line is too dangerous, he will shortly have no front line. . . ."

The hollow sound of the hooves came nearer, clear in the hush. Then Bogomazov's rifle cracked, and the lead horse reared, throwing its rider; the ice gave way beneath its hind feet, and it floundered. Guns began going off all along the line of houses as Bogomazov came wriggling back. The horsemen on the ice scattered, trotting and crouching low in the saddles, returning the fire. Bullets ricocheted screaming through the village, ripping splinters from walls and roofs.

Some of the *razbóiniki* were busied dragging their wounded or foundered comrades and their mounts back toward the farther shore, but off to the right a handful of horsemen broke into a reckless gallop across the groaning ice, making determinedly for the low bank above the village. Bogomazov, rifle slung, started in that direction, beckoning some of the defenders from the firing line and bellowing to the others: "Fire only at the ones still coming! Save your cartridges!"

The *razbóiniki* made the shore and bore down on Novoselye's flank, whooping, urging their unkempt ponies to a dead run. They were heading for the corral, hoping to smash the stockade around it and drive the cattle

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off; but when they were almost upon their objective bullets started snapping among them. One man spun from his saddle and went rolling along the frozen ground, and a horse sprawled headlong, pinning its rider. The others' nerve broke, and they wheeled and fled.

Bogomazov walked out, pistol ready, to inspect the casualties. The man who had been hit was already dead. Bogomazov fired twice with cool precision, finishing first the gasping, lung-shot horse and then the rider who lay stunned beneath it.

He told his men, "They may attack repeatedly. We will establish watches."

But the *razbóiniki* had had enough. After an anxious hour of watching the movements on the far side of the river, the villagers became aware that the enemy, horse, foot, and wagons, had reassembled in marching order and was streaming away southward. The Novoselyane laughed, wept with relief, and embraced one another; someone did an impromptu clog-dance in the street.

Bogomazov entered the sooty one-room dwelling which, because of his occupancy, was known as the *nachál 'naya izbá*, the "primary hut." He breathed the warm close air gratefully, beginning to shed his mittens and padded coat. Then he stopped short as he saw Smith warming his hands by the stove, a rifle slung over his shoulder. "Where did you get that?"

The American grinned. "One of the proletariat developed combat fatigue about ten seconds after the shooting started, so I filled in."

Bogomazov hesitated imperceptibly, then thrust his hand out. "Give it to me."

Slowly Smith unslung the weapon and handed it over. Bogomazov unloaded it, stuffed the cartridges into his pocket, opened the door of the *izbá* and called to a passing boy. "Here. You are responsible for delivering this rifle to Comrade Ivanov."

The youth hugged the rifle to him, looking adoringly at Bogomazov. "Yes, sir, Comrade General!"

Bogomazov started to speak, checked himself, and closed the door.

"So you're putting the guns under lock and key again."

"Naturally. Ivanov is attending to that now."

The American raised an eyebrow quizzically. "In my country's Constitution there is, or used to be, a provision safeguarding the people's right to keep and bear arms."

"The Soviet Constitution contains no such provision."

"Today, though, we might have been overrun and massacred if the enemy had approached less openly, and hadn't been seen in time for you to break out the guns."

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Bogomazov sank wearily onto a bench by the fire and began unwinding the rags that served him as leggings. He said heavily, "*Mister* Smeet, you are neither a Russian nor a Communist, and you do not understand these people as I do. You had better leave administration to me, and devote yourself to those matters which you are expert in. . . . How is your work with the radio?"

Smith shook his head impatiently. "Nothing there — I can't raise any signals, maybe because there aren't any. . . . But the question of the guns is a secondary one. The main thing is — what are we going to do now?"

The Russian eyed him wonderingly. "What do you mean?"

"I came here to speak to you because the attack today confirmed a suspicion that's been growing on me for some time, ever since the first bandits raided through here in November. . . . Did you notice the organization these *razbóiniki* seemed to have? They were fairly well disciplined; they attacked from and fell back on a mobile camp, with wagons no doubt carrying their women and children, and with driven cattle. The population of their whole camp must be two or three times that of Novoselye."

"So? We beat them off. You saw that they proceeded south; the winter is too much for them, whereas we will sit it out snugly in our houses, so long as order is maintained and rations are conserved."

"But they'll be back in the spring."

"Perhaps. If so, we will be stronger by then."

"How stronger? We've very little rifle ammunition left, and before the spring crop comes in there's going to be trouble with malnutrition."

"The marauders are subject to the same troubles. In Lipy, only fifty kilometers from here, there is a man who knows how to make gunpowder."

"I could make gunpowder, for that matter — but damned if I know where to find any sulfur. . . . You miss the point. The signs of organization we saw indicate that these people, wherever they came from originally, have succeeded in taking to a nomadic way of life — a permanently roving existence. They'll be on us again next spring, without 'perhaps.' "

Bogomazov shrugged impatiently. "So, there are dangers. I am not losing sight of them. You had better concentrate on trying to establish radio communication."

The American said hotly, "You're still blind to what this development means! You . . . Well, before this war some of our Western 'bourgeois' historians — naturally you wouldn't have read their writings — saw human history as a long struggle between two basically different ways of life, the two main streams of social evolution: Civilization and Nomadism. Civilization is a way of life based on agriculture — principally cereal crops — on fixed places of habitation, on comparatively stable social patterns whose

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highest form is the state. Nomadism, on the other hand, has as its economic foundation not fields, but herds; geographically, it rests not on settlements, villages, towns, cities, but on perpetual migration from pasture to pasture; socially, its typical higher form of organization is not the state, but the horde.

"Since written history began the boundary between Civilization and Nomadism has swayed back and forth as one or the other gained local advantage; but in general, during the historic period — really a very small part of the whole past of humanity — Civilization has been on the offensive. The last great onslaught from the nomad world was in the Twelfth Century — the Mongol conquests, which swept through this very region and brought about the period that your historians call the Tartar Yoke. By the Eighteenth Century the counterattack of Civilization had been so successful that the historian Gibbon — another bourgeois you probably haven't read — could rejoice that 'cannon and fortifications' had made Europe forever secure against any more such invasions. It looked as if Nomadism was through, due to disappear altogether. . . . But Civilization went on to invent the means of destroying itself: weapons indefinitely effective against the fixed installations that civilized life depends on, but of little consequence to the rootless nomad.

"And now — where are your cannon, your fortifications, your coal mines and steel mills, your nitrogen-fixing and sulfuric-acid plants? When you discount these raiders as nuisances, you're still living in a world that's just died a violent death. We no longer have the whole of Civilization backing us up; we're on our own!"

Bogomazov had listened with half-shut eyes, soaking up the fire's warmth. "Then you think Civilization is finished?"

"No! But I think that what's left of it will have to fall back and regroup. You and we, the Americans and Russians — we fought our war for the control of Civilization, and very nearly wrecked it in the process; but on both sides we were and are on the side of Civilization. That's what counts now. . . . What's our situation here? According to the scanty liaison we've achieved, there are a number of other settlements like this up and down the river, scattered seeds trying to take root again. From the east, toward the Caspian, there's no news at all, and westward, in the Ukraine, reports tell of nothing but wandering bands — the blights the planes spread interdicted agriculture throughout that region for some years to come.

"In spring the *razbóiniki* will be on us again — and perhaps in the meantime their fragmentary groups will have coalesced into bigger and more formidable hordes. With their rediscovered technique of nomadic life, they'll be expanding into the vacuum created by the internal collapse of

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the civilized world, as the Huns and their kindred did when the Roman Empire fell. . . . I think we have no choice but to migrate west as soon as the spring crop is in. This country here can no longer be held for Civilization; for one thing it's too badly devastated, and for another it's all one huge plain, natural nomad country. The Eurasian plain extends through Northern Europe, clear across Germany and France; we should move south to look for a more favorable geography. It might be possible to make a stand in the Crimea, but it's said the radioactivity is very bad there; either the Balkans or Italy, with their mountains, should probably be our ultimate objective."

Bogomazov sat up straight, looking hard at Smith. He frowned. "You are suggesting — that Russia be abandoned to the *razbóiniki?*"

"Exactly. That will be the result in any case: I'm suggesting that we save ourselves while we've got time."

The Communist's eyes narrowed, with a peculiar glitter; he was motionless and silent for a moment, then he barked with humorless laughter. "You want to lecture a Marxist on history! I know history. Do you know that this is the very region where took place the events told in the *Tale of Igor's Host;* the same region where Prince Dmitri Donskói overthrew the Golden Horde? And you tell me to retreat from a handful of bandits! Do you know —"

"I don't see what the bygone glories of Holy Russia have to do either with Marxism or with preserving Civilization," Smith interrupted drily.

The other rose to his feet, rocking on them like an undersized but infuriated bear, and glared hotly at the American's lanky figure. He shouted, "Will you be quiet, before I —"

The door slammed open, letting in a cold blast, and in it stood Ivanov breathing hard. He gasped, "Comrade Bogomazov! There are two rifles missing!"

In a flash Bogomazov was himself again, reaching for his coat. "Two? I'll investigate, and whoever is trying to hide —"

"Beg pardon, Comrade Bogomazov, but it's worse than that. Vasya and Mishka-the-Frog — that is, Citizens Rudin and Bagryanov — are gone with the rifles."

"The young fools . . ." Bogomazov plunged through the doorway, still struggling into his coat. Smith followed more slowly; when he caught up, the Communist was in the center of a knot of villagers, furiously interrogating a shawl-wrapped old woman who was bitterly weeping.

"Where did they go? Which way?" demanded Bogomazov.

The old woman, mother of one of the missing youths, only sniffled repeatedly: "*Ushlí v razbóiniki* . . . they went to the robbers. . . ."

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The Communist wheeled from her in disgust, fists clenching uselessly at his sides. Smith said conversationally, "You'll never catch them now. There you see the effect of another weapon in Nomadism's arsenal."

"What in the devil's name are you talking about?"

"Psychological warfare. Those young fellows, finding guns in their hands and adventure in their hearts, deserted Civilization and its dreary chores for a more romantic-looking life."

Bogomazov grunted angrily, "Ideological nonsense! Russians have always run off to join the robbers. It's in their nature."

"Exactly. As boys in my country used to head West in hopes of becoming cowboys. I wonder what's happening in the American West now. . . . Men have always tended to rebel against civilized restraints and hanker after the nomad's free, picturesque existence; and when the restraints are loosened, they may bolt."

"We can do without that pair. And you —" Bogomazov eyed the American stonily and spoke with deliberate emphasis. "You'll not repeat these notions of yours to anyone else — understood?" Without awaiting any response, he turned on his heel and stalked away toward the *nachál 'naya izbá.*

Smith gazed somberly after him, knowing that further argument would be useless. The decision was made — to stand and fight it out here.

Spring came with the thunderous breakup of the river ice, with the sluicing of thawed water that made the prairie a trackless wilderness of mud for a time, with the pushing of new green everywhere on the vast rolling plains and, less densely, in the fields that last fall had been so painfully broken and seeded.

Spring came with foreboding, that somehow waxed apace with the hope that returning green life wakens in all living. Smith had kept his ideas to himself; but the Novoselyane whispered among themselves. Those who had been city-dwellers had nothing but a formless and unfocused fear of the great windy spaces, the silences, the night noises of birds and water-creatures along the marshy river brim; but the peasants had their immemorial stories, raised up from the depths of a tradition as deep as race-memory, given new and frightening meanings. Over their heads had come and gone serfdom, emancipation, serfdom again under the name of collectivization, and finally the apocalyptic swallowing-up of the world of cities that they had never quite understood or trusted . . . and they remembered other things.

They knew that in the old days the greening swells beyond the river had been the edge of the world, the Tartar steppe, out of which the khans had

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ridden to see the Russian princes grovel and bring tribute before the horsetail standards. The grandiose half-finished works of the Fifth Five-Year Plan were strewn wreckage there now, and it came to their mind that perhaps it was the Tartar steppe again. They remembered the ancient sorrows of the Slavs, the woes that are told in the Russian Primary Chronicle. They spoke darkly of the Horde of Mamai, which in Russian speech has passed into proverbs; and of the *obry*, whose name now means "ogres," but who historically were the nomad Avars, that took to herding human cattle even into the heart of Europe. . . .

When the Communists were not watching them, they studied signs in the flight of migrating birds and the cries of night fowl. Somehow all the portents were evil.

There were more tangible reasons for alarm. News filtered in of settlements downriver raided and laid waste by wandering bands, whose numbers and ferocity no doubt grew mightily in the telling. Bogomazov succeeded in suppressing or minimizing most of these reports, but not all, nor could trailing smoke-smudges in the southern sky one bright afternoon be concealed. . . .

Bogomazov sensed the slow rise of dark superstitious fear around him, and he moved about the village, the faithful Ivanov trotting at his heels, scolding, coaxing, exhorting, all to scant avail; to combat the villagers' fears was like wrestling with an amorphous thing in a nightmare. Once upon a time a local administrator could have reached for the telephone and conjured up an impressive caravan of Party officials in shiny automobiles, with uniforms, medals, and manners which would leave the yokels for many weeks incapable of saying anything but "Yes, Comrade." Or he might have pointed to airplanes droning across the sky as visible signs of the omnipotence of the Soviet State. But now there was no telephone, and all that flew was the migrant birds, passing northward day after day as if fleeing from some terror in the South.

"We are on our own now," thought Bogomazov, then scowled as he remembered that the American had said it.

The end came suddenly.

Smith had gone out with half a dozen peasants to inspect the growing wheat. All at once they looked up and saw, across the narrow width of a field, a little group of horsemen, no more than their own number, quietly sitting their shaggy ponies, watching. How they had come up so silently and unseen was a mystery; it was as if the world had changed to that fairy-tale plenum of possibilities in which armed bands spring up from seed sown in the earth.

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These watchers carried a bizarre mixture of modern and primitive armament; some had rifles, but cavalry sabers dangled against their thighs, and some bore spears whose hammered iron points flashed in the sun.

The two parties were motionless, confronting one another for a minute or two like strangers from different worlds. Then the interlopers wheeled about without haste and trotted away over a rise.

"Come on!" said Smith quietly, and set out at a run for the village.

Bogomazov, face impassive, heard the news that the danger was again upon them. He produced his key and opened the padlocked shed door — and stood frozen in dismay, for the shed was empty. Someone had employed the winter's leisure to tunnel under a side wall and remove all the guns.

"Who did this?" shouted the Communist at the villagers assembling in the square.

"Not I, Comrade . . ."

"It wasn't I, Comrade . . ."

Uniformly, the peasant faces reflected the transparent guilt of naughty children.

"Very well!" said Bogomazov bitterly. "You're all in it. You've stolen the guns and hidden them, in the thatch, under the floor, no matter where. But now, bring them out — do you hear?"

They stirred uneasily, but did not move to obey.

"Apparently," said a sardonic voice, "the Soviet Constitution has been amended."

"You! . . . Were *you* behind this thievery?"

"Certainly not," said Smith. "They don't trust me too far either — they have a hazy notion that I'm one of your kind, one of the rulers they hate but haven't learned to do without."

He swung around and said, without raising his voice, to the men nearest: "You've taken the guns for your own protection — if you intend to use them that way, now's the time. The main body of the *razbóiniki* won't be far behind the scouting party we saw. Do you propose to defend yourselves, the houses you've built and the fields you've plowed?"

They murmured among themselves, and began to drift off by twos and threes. Presently men were emerging from all the huts, awkwardly carrying the missing rifles.

It was all of a taut hour before they had sight again of the enemy, but for a good part of that hour they heard the mournful creaking of wagons in the steppe, out of view beyond the higher ground. The sound was disembodied, sourceless, seeming to come from nowhere and everywhere.

The men of Novoselye clustered in uneasy groups, waiting, fingering their weapons unsteadily. Bogomazov took charge, ordering them here and there,

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lashing the village into a posture of defense; they obeyed him, but half-heartedly, with the look of dumb driven cattle on their faces.

One moment there was no sign of the foe save for the creaking of unseen wheels. The next, a dozen mounted figures were briefly silhouetted along the skyline, dipped down the green wave of the grassy slope toward the fields, and were followed by others and yet others, till — to eyes wavering in beginning panic — the whole hillside seemed sliding down in an avalanche of men and horses.

"Steady!" snapped Bogomazov. "Hold your fire —"

Abruptly one man let his rifle fall and turned, sobbing, to flee; it was Ivanov, the other Communist. Bogomazov intercepted him in two long strides and felled him with a full-armed blow, the pistol weighting his hand.

"Get up, get back to your post!" he spat into the dazed and bloody face.

But the villagers had already begun to fall back down the street, in a concerted tide of fear that threatened momentarily to become a total rout.

Smith, looming conspicuous by his height among them, shouted in a carrying voice, "*Don't drop your guns!* We'll make a stand in the square!" The American materialized at Bogomazov's side and wrenched urgently at his arm, dragging him, dazed with fury and disappointment, after the retreating mob. "Come on! If we can hold the men together for a few minutes, maybe we can still rally them."

The *razbóiniki* were jogging across the planted ground, trampling ruthlessly over the new wheat. From the street's other end rose a cry, "Here they come!" and almost simultaneously someone screamed and pointed across the river, where a third troop had come into view on the opposite bank, as if posted to cut off the last possible escape.

As the invaders, with jingling bridles and clattering hooves, swept from two sides into Novoselye, its able-bodied inhabitants huddled in the square; those who still clutched their weapons and those without wore the same look of hopeless waiting for an expected blow.

The *razbóiniki* closed in cautiously. Their leader, a squat leathery-looking man with a wide Kalmyk face, rode near; he reined in and looked down expressionlessly — at the Novoselyane. He said loudly, in stumbling Russian. "We — not want kill you. You give up — we burn village, go. Be peace." He repeated, "Peace!" watching for their response with almost a benevolent air, the while he tightened the strap of his slung rifle — it was his most prized possession, a German rifle that could hit targets at a thousand yards, and he had no intention of wasting his few remaining cartridges in close fighting. An old saber hung loose in its sheath at his side.

Smith pushed forward and spoke slowly and distinctly: "We too desire peace, between your people and ours. Why should we fight and waste lives,

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when so few are left after the great war? You are wanderers, we farm the land — only a little of the land, so there is room for both of us."

He watched the stolid Asiatic face keenly for any hint of response. Did the *razbóinik* leader realize that the villagers wouldn't fight, that — so far as this outpost was concerned — the resistance of Civilization was at an end?

"Village — bad," the Kalmyk declared, with unhelpful gestures. "Build houses, plow land — then, *boom!* No good . . ." He gave up, and half-turned in the saddle, beckoning to a young man with Slavic features. The latter advanced a couple of paces, and said glibly in Russian:

"The *vozhd'* means that it is dangerous to live in towns. If people live in towns, sooner or later the American bombers come, many are killed and others sickened with burns and bowels turning to water; the death blows even across the steppes and kills animals and men. . . . We cannot allow you to live in such danger. So we will burn this town, and in return for the favor we do you we will take only half the cattle, and such ammunition as you may have that will fit the guns we possess; for the rest, you may keep your arms and movable property, and go freely where you like. Whoever may wish to join us is welcome."

"Your terms are too hard," said Smith steadily. "And you —"

He was interrupted. Bogomazov, pale with determination, thrust him aside and shouted in a voice of command, "That man is a traitor to the motherland! Citizens, follow me!"

The pistol in his hand roared, but in the instant as he aimed the young spokesman had thrown himself flat over his horse's neck. Simultaneously the Kalmyk leader leaned far out of the saddle, and his saber descended like a silent flash of lightning.

The villagers on one side, the raiders on the other, stared unmoving, unmoved, at the fallen man. Smith bent over him, almost under the nervously dancing feet of the Kalmyk's pony.

Bogomazov made a great effort to rise, and failed. His eyes looked unfocusedly up into the American's face; his expression was one of incredulity.

He strove to speak, choking on blood. Smith leaned close, and thought he understood the dying man's last words, uttered with that look of dazed wonder: "*Even a Bolshevik* . . ."

The nomad spokesman rode forward again, red in the face, and shouted fiercely, "Are there any more dissenters?"

Smith stood up and faced them. The game was lost and the enemy knew it now, but he still had to try the last card he possessed. He said tensely, "You are mistaken. The American bombers aren't coming any more."

"How can you know?"

"Because I myself am an American."

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There was a dead hush, in which Smith heard clearly the noise of a carbine's hammer being drawn back. The Kalmyk's slanted eyes rested inscrutably upon him. Then the man grinned under his straggling mustache, and said something, a rapid string of Asiatic syllables.

"The *vozhd'* says: That may or may not be true. To him you seem to be a man much like other men."

"But —" Smith began.

"*But* we're taking no chances. We burn the village in half an hour; you have that long to assemble your goods. Those who wish to move on with us will signify by gathering in the field yonder. *Kryshka* — that's all!"

Smith let his hands fall to his sides. Some of the villagers had already begun to drift toward the indicated assembly point.

Some way out in the steppe there was a *kurgán*, an ancient grass-grown burial mound of some forgotten people. Civilizations, wars, and disasters had passed it by and it was the same. It was the highest point for many miles. From it Smith watched the glowing embers of the New Settlement.

All around was the plain, immense and darkening in the spring twilight. Thousands of miles, months of footsore march, it must be to reach any place where there would be a doubtful security and a chance to begin anew. Time and space — once man had conquered them, but now man was a rare animal again in a world where time and space mocked him. Smith wondered: Would they be conquered again in his own lifetime, or that of his grandchildren? Bogomazov had been lucky in a way; his training had enabled him to disbelieve what he knew to be true, so that he had never been forced to recognize the meaning of what had happened — or had he, there at the end?

In the West the horizon was empty, or at least his eyes could no longer make out against the sunset the black specks of the westward-marching horde. About half of the uprooted villagers had gone with it — with few exceptions, those who had come originally from the cities, the factories; the peasants remained. They were encamped now about the ancient mound.

Behind Smith a voice asked plaintively, "Comrade American — what will we do? Some of us think we should go on south, toward . . ."

"Don't bother me now!" Smith said harshly; then, as the man drew back abashed: "Tomorrow . . . we'll see, tomorrow."

The retreating feet were soundless on the grassy slope. Down by the river the last sparks were dying. Somewhere far off in the steppe shuddered a mournful cry that Smith did not know — perhaps it was the howl of a wolf. In the West the light faded, and night fell with the darkness sweeping on illimitable wings out of Asia.

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Minneapolis has produced far more than her fair share of science-fantasy writers. Fredric Brown, William Campbell Gault, Robert Bloch, Theodore Cogswell, Poul Anderson . . . But all of these have now departed and are pounding their typewriters elsewhere; and of that noble Minneapolitan crew hardly a one remains save Anderson's friend and frequent collaborator, Gordon R. Dickson. Dickson, however, is doing a fine job of upholding single-handed the traditions of the Twin City (where are the fantasy authors of St. Paul?) by turning out a steady production of unpredictably varied stories. All of these Minnesotans seem to be versatile, and Dickson is unusually so. His last story here was a subtle and sensitive interstellar mood-piece (Listen!, *F&SF, August, 1952); now he presents a broad farce-fantasy of the dire interaction of a singleton aunt and an 83-dimensional Zanch Scientist.*

Miss Prinks

by GORDON R. DICKSON

Miss Lydia Prinks was somebody's aunt. Not the aunt of several somebodies, but the aunt of one person only and with no other living brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews or nieces to her name. A sort of singleton aunt. It would be possible to describe her further; but it would not be in good taste. To draw a clearer picture possibly would be to destroy the anonymity that Miss Prinks has, at the cost of a very great sacrifice indeed, maintained. Think of her then as a singleton aunt; and you have a pretty fair picture of her.

She lived on a sort of annuity in a small apartment up three flights of stairs on a certain street in a middle-sized city. The apartment had pale gold curtains of lace, a green carpet and furniture upholstered in wine red. It had an assortment of good books in the bookcases and good pictures on the wall and a large, fat cat called Solomon on a footstool. It was a very proper sort of apartment for a singleton aunt living on an annuity; and Miss Prinks lived a peaceful, contented sort of life there.

That is to say, she *did* live a peaceful, contented sort of life until one afternoon just after lunch when the grandfather clock in the corner of the living room, having gone from 12 noon through 12:45, went one step

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further than it had ever done before; and instead of striking 1 o'clock, struck 13.

"What on earth —" said Miss Prinks, looking up astonished from her current Book-of-the-Month Club selection and staring at the clock. Solomon, the fat cat, also raised his head inquiringly.

"*What on earth!*" repeated Miss Prinks, indignantly. She stared hard at the clock, for she was a very ladylike person herself, and the apartment was very ladylike; and there is something nearly bohemian about a clock which, after 28 years of striking correctly, jumps the traces and tolls off an impossible hour like thirteen.

"Now who's responsible for this, I'd like to know?" said Miss Prinks, almost fiercely, addressing the room at large. And then it happened.

Miss Prinks had not really expected an answer to her question. But she got one. For no sooner had the words left her mouth — in fact, while the words were still vibrating in the air — a strange something like a small, busily whirling dust devil began mistily to take form in the middle of the green carpet. At first only a wisp of vapor, it grew rapidly until it was quite solidly visible and the breeze of its rapid rotation fluttered the gold lace curtains.

"I'm afraid," spoke an apologetic voice inside Miss Prinks' head, "that I am responsible, Madam."

Now this was not the sort of answer which would be calculated to calm the fears of an ordinary person who has just discovered that it is 13 o'clock — a time that never was, and it is profoundly hoped, will never be again. But Miss Prinks was a singleton aunt of great courage and rock-hard convictions. Her personal philosophy started with the incontrovertible fact that she was a lady and went on from there. Starting from this fact, then, and going down the line of natural reasoning, it followed that the miniature dust devil, whatever else it might be, was a *Vandal* — a clock-gimmicking *Vandal*, just as the neighborhood boys who played baseball in the adjoining vacant lot were window-smashing *Vandals*, and the drunken man who on one previous occasion had parked his car up on the apartment building's front lawn was a grass-destroying *Vandal*. And with *Vandals*, Miss Prinks took a firm line.

"You're a *Vandal!*" she said angrily, to put the creature in its place and make it realize that she saw it for what it was.

This appeared to disconcert the dust devil somewhat. It paused before replying.

"I beg your pardon?" it thought. "I don't seem to understand that name you called me. Surely you never saw me before?"

"Perhaps not," retorted Miss Prinks, fiercely. "But I know your type!"

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"You do?" The dust devil's thought was clearly astonished. Then it seemed to gather dignity. "Be that as it may," it thought. "Allow me to explain what has happened."

"Very well," said Miss Prinks in the cold, impartial tones of a judge agreeing to hear a case.

"You may know my type," said the dust devil. "But I am sure you do not know me personally. I am —" he paused; and Miss Prinks felt little light fingers searching for the proper term in her mind, "a scientist of the eighty-third Zanch dimension. I was doing some research into the compressibility of time for a commercial concern in my sector of eighty-third dimensional space. They wished to know whether it would be feasible to package and ship time in wholesale quantities —."

Miss Prinks made an impatient gesture.

"— Anyhow," thought the dust devil hurriedly, "to make a long story short, there was an explosion; and roughly an hour of the time I was experimenting with was blown into your day. Naturally, I am extremely sorry about it; and I'll be only too glad to take the hour back."

"My clock —" said Miss Prinks, coldly.

"I will take care of it," said the dust devil, or Zanch Scientist, to refer to him correctly. "I will realign its temporal coordinates and make whatever spatial corrections are necessary." He waited anxiously for Miss Prinks to agree.

Now, to tell the truth, Miss Prinks was beginning to soften inside. The politeness of the Zanch Scientist was making a good impression on her in spite of herself. But she did not want to give in too easily.

"Well . . ." she said, hesitantly.

"Ah, but naturally!" cried the Zanch Scientist mentally. "You feel yourself entitled to some compensation for the temporal damage done to your day. Don't think another word. I understand completely."

"Well . . ." said Miss Prinks, with a hint of a deprecating smile that in a less ladylike person would have been a simper. "I know nothing at all about business arrangements of that type —"

"Of course," said the Zanch Scientist. "Allow me. . . ." Again light fingers touched the surface of Miss Prinks's mind. "Forgive me for saying it, but I have reviewed your condition and noticé several improvements that could be made. If you have no objection . . . ?"

Miss Prinks half-turned her head away.

"Of course not," she said.

It has often been recorded in history that two people have come to shipwreck upon the mutual misunderstanding of a single word. This was merely one more of those instances. Miss Prinks was a lady; and she thought in

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ladylike terms. To her, the word *condition* referred to a person's position in the world, and particularly to that aspect of position which is related to the financial by grosser minds. She believed, therefore, that the Zanch Scientist was, with the utmost delicacy, offering her monetary damages. Such things were, out of consideration for one another's feelings, referred to in periphrasis. Her sensitivity to the social situation forbade her to do anything as gross as inquiring about the amount.

The Zanch Scientist, of course, had no such intention in mind. He was telepathic, but not particularly perceptive, and he knew nothing of human mores. To him, Miss Prinks was an organism with certain mental and physical attributes. Frankly, over a cup of something Zanchly, he was later to admit to a co-worker that these were pretty horrible. But such bluntness was reserved for moments of intimacy among his own people. In his way, he also had manners. Therefore he used the thought *condition*, as a manager might refer to his boxer, or (more appositely) as a doctor might refer to a patient in the last stages of a wasting disease.

"Of course not," said Miss Prinks.

"Fine," said the Zanch Scientist. There was a sudden shimmer in the air of the apartment living room; and Miss Prinks felt a strange quiver run from the soles of her feet to the tips of her hair. Then the room was empty.

The grandfather clock solemnly tolled 2.

"Well!" said Miss Prinks.

Now that the Zanch Scientist was actually gone, she found herself of two minds about him. He had undoubtedly been polite; but then he had also as undeniably been in the wrong. However, the important thing was that he was gone. And it was 2 o'clock.

She had shopping to do. There was a small business center two blocks from where she lived and when the weather was good, it was her practice to visit this early in the afternoon, leaving the latter part of the day for a visit to the public library which was only a block away from the shopping center in another direction. Miss Prinks reached for her purse, which was ready on the table beside her, and arose from her chair.

Arose is indeed the best description. With the first effort she exerted to get up from her chair, Miss Prinks shot forward and upward in an arc that carried her across the room, through the gold lace curtains and the window, which was fortunately open, and down three stories to the sidewalk below. She landed on her feet; and, though the sound of her landing was noisy in the drowsy summer afternoon, it did not seem as if the fall had hurt her in any way. In fact, thought Miss Prinks, standing on the sidewalk with a disturbed expression on her face, she had never really felt so well in her life.

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Just at that moment, however, she became aware that somebody was calling her name. She turned and recognized her neighbor on the first floor below her apartment — a somewhat mousy little woman with the name of Annabelle LeMer.

"Oooh, Lydia!" cried Annabelle LeMer, as she reached Miss Prinks by the expedient of running frantically out into the street. "I was watering the flowers in my window box and I saw it all. Whatever possessed you to jump out the window?"

There are some times when a lady must take refuge in a complete refusal to discuss a subject. Miss Prinks was quick to realize that this moment was one of those. She drew herself up with queenly dignity.

"I?" she repeated in tones of icy outrage. "*I* jump out a window? You are having one of your bilious attacks, Annabelle."

"But I saw —" babbled the little woman in desperation.

"Bilious!" snapped Miss Prinks in a tone of voice that brooked no contradiction. She glared at Annabelle with such ferocity that the smaller woman faltered and began to doubt the evidence of her own senses. "*I* jump out a window! The very idea!"

So convincing was her tone that Annabelle LeMer began to half-feel the waves of dizziness that in actual truth preceded one of her bilious attacks. She looked at Miss Prinks and then up at the window with the gold lace curtains three stories above. She looked so long that the blood rushed out of her head and when she returned her gaze to Miss Prinks, the street wavered about her.

"P-perhaps —" stammered Miss LeMer dizzily, "perhaps you're right, Lydia." And, turning away from Miss Prinks' angry gaze, she weaved back into her own apartment, to put cold packs on her forehead and collapse on the bed.

Left alone on the sidewalk, Miss Prinks experimented. She found that by being very, very careful not to exert herself, and by attempting what she felt were tiny steps, she could walk in quite a natural manner. By the time she had this matter straightened out, she found herself at the end of the block and, so strong is habit, decided to keep on going and get her shopping done.

This decision was an excellent one; and one that might well have carried her through the rest of the day without mishap. Unfortunately, fate took a hand; and the manner in which it did so was unexpected.

Now it must be confessed that, while Miss Prinks herself was every inch a lady, her neighborhood was perhaps not quite the best that a lady could live in. Perhaps it was not even the second best. One block away from the apart-

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ment building in which Miss Prinks lived, and halfway to the shopping center which she patronized and intended to visit today, there was something which for want of a better pair of words must bluntly be described as railroad tracks. Squarely athwart Miss Prinks's way they lay; and to get over them she was forced to cross a bridge beneath which the tracks lay in dark parallels and under which the trains smoked and thundered.

Usually, at the time when Miss Prinks normally went marketing, there were no trains, and she was able with ladylike detachment to ignore the fact that they existed. But today, owing to the particular circumstances following lunch, she was later than usual and just in time for the early afternoon *Comet*, a crack passenger train possessing great speed and a mighty whistle for blowing at railway crossings and other artifacts of the present-day civilization. It was a very distinctive and a very powerful whistle; and to tell the truth, the engineer who usually handled the *Comet* on its early afternoon run liked blowing it whenever the excuse offered.

Just what the excuse was this day, no one will ever know. But it is a fact that the engineer blew the *Comet's* whistle as he started under the bridge Miss Prinks was on. And he blew it just as she was right in the middle of her crossing.

Miss Prinks, it has been shown, had iron courage. But she also had very ladylike and delicate nerves. So, when the *Comet* shot under her feet and the whistle blasted away practically in her ear, she could not repress a tiny start.

Unfortunately, people in Miss Prinks's made-over condition should never start. For ordinary humans it is all right; but Miss Prinks's start shot her up into the air and into a long arc that dropped her on the tracks some twenty yards in front of the charging *Comet*.

Miss Prinks took one horrified glance at the towering engine rushing down upon her, turned heel, and ran.

"Ulp!" said the Engineer; and fainted dead away.

The landscape blurred by Miss Prinks and she felt her breath growing shorter. She risked a quick glance over her shoulder and nearly fainted herself. Behind her, the tracks stretched bare and empty to the horizon. The *Comet* was nowhere in sight.

Nor was the city.

Profoundly shaken, Miss Prinks leaped off the tracks, and, skidding to a stop, sat down heavily on a bank by the side of the tracks.

"Am I dead?" wondered Miss Prinks, in awe. "Did the train run me down?"

Being a practical person, she took her pulse — correctly, with the second finger of her left hand on her right wrist. Her blood pulsed strongly and

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steadily. That settled it then, as far as Miss Prinks was concerned. She was alive.

Miss Prinks fanned herself with her purse and began to think. She thought back over the last few hours and she thought and she thought; and suddenly she stopped fanning herself and turned a bright pink with embarrassment.

"*Well!*" she said.

She had just realized what the Zanch Scientist had meant when he used the word *condition* and what he had evidently done to her. At the thought of being altered, she blushed again.

However, one cannot go on being embarrassed forever, as Miss Prinks abruptly realized, with unusual clarity of mind. She had been changed, the Zanch Scientist was gone where she most probably could never reach him; and the thing to do was to investigate herself.

Her shoes caught her attention first. These were, quite literally, in ruined condition. The sole and heel of each was worn to rags. There was, in fact, little left but the tops. Torn edges stuck out over the bare arch of her foot like sad tendrils. Miss Prinks began to get some idea of how fast she had been running when she fled from the express train.

"Oh, my poor feet!" thought Miss Prinks, automatically; and then immediately had to correct herself. Her feet felt fine. In fact, they had never felt so fine, even in the dim past of her childhood when she had been allowed to run barefoot. A suspicion struck her; and she leaned over to check once more. Her bunions were gone.

Modestly, she tucked her soleless shoes under her and went back to considering the situation. She, Miss Prinks, could run faster than a train. Impossible; but here she was and — she looked back along the tracks — the *Comet* was not even in sight. If she could run that fast, how high could she jump?

She glanced quickly around the countryside. It was open and deserted with occasional clumps of trees and farmland stretching out of sight over rolling hills. There was no sign even of a building. Miss Prinks got gingerly to her feet, tucked her purse firmly under one arm, crouched slightly, and sprang.

There was a terrific rush of air, a moment's dizzy sensation and Miss Prinks found herself gasping for oxygen high in the atmosphere. Far below her, laid out in neat little checkerboard squares, the ground from horizon to horizon rocked and swayed.

"Oh my!" thought Miss Prinks in dismay as she reached the limit of her spring, turned over and started head downward toward the earth. "Now I've done it!"

On the way to the ground, however, she thought of the proprieties and

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turned herself right side up again; which was, as it turned out, a very prudent move. For instead of landing on ordinary ground and sinking in about ten feet, she had the good luck to land on a large boulder which shattered into fragments beneath the impact of her falling body, but left her quite properly on the surface of the earth.

Miss Prinks took time out to powder her nose and catch her breath.

It would be foolish to deny that at this point she was becoming somewhat excited about the possibilities inherent in her new self. When she had finished powdering her nose, she tried out a few more tests. She discovered that she was now capable of doing the following things:

(a) Felling a tree approximately two feet thick with one punch.
(b) Tying knots in sections of rail from the railway track.
(c) Lifting the largest boulder in sight (which was about ten feet high) and throwing it about 80 feet.
(d) Doing all of the above without working up an unladylike perspiration.

But it was not these feats that startled her so much as a quite accidental discovery. She had untied the knots in the steel rails and was replacing them on the railway track, hammering in the spikes with dainty taps of her fist, when a tiny splinter on one of the wooden ties seemed to come to life and walk away on six legs. Earlier that morning, Miss Prinks would never have recognised it, but no sooner had its movement caught her attention than she immediately identified it as *Diapheromera femorata*, or common walking-stick insect of the eastern United States — being somewhat far west considering the present latitude.

For a moment her identification astounded her; and then she remembered reading about this particular insect some years previous, one day in one of those little squibs of general information which are used by editors to fill out columns in the daily newspaper. With letter-perfect recall, the item came back to her. For a moment she was tempted to speculate about the family of the *Phasmidae* in general; but she pushed the temptation from her, and set herself instead to considering the implications of this most recent self-discovery.

So Miss Prinks sat and thought; and, after having thought for a while, she took her way back alongside the railroad tracks at a jog trot in the neighborhood of a hundred miles an hour. On the way she passed the *Comet*.

This time the Engineer did not faint. He merely shut his eyes firmly and told himself that he needed glasses.

At the outskirts of town, Miss Prinks slowed down to an ordinary human

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gait, so as not to attract attention, and took a streetcar back to her apartment, where she changed shoes and sallied forth once more — this time to the library three blocks away.

The library was a large, rambling building of brown brick, split up into a number of large rooms, each of which specialized in the supply of some particular class of reading material to the general public. One of these dealt with material on the more abstract branches of science; and it was this one that Miss Prinks, with some trepidation, entered.

She spoke to the woman clerk behind the desk, filled out some slips, and after a due wait was supplied with several books, in particular one rather heavy and impressive-looking volume.

It was this one she opened first. She skimmed through the first few pages, clicked her tongue disapprovingly, and went back to the desk to order several textbooks on mathematics, leading up to and including one on Tensor Calculus. She returned with these to her seat and flipped through them with amazing rapidity. Then she set them aside with a satisfied air; and returned to her original volume.

She sat reading this for some time; and when she had finally finished it and laid it aside, she continued to sit deep in thought for some time.

A new factor had entered into her life. A social, scientific, and for all that, probably a moral and ethical problem as well. It had come as a direct result of what the Zanch Scientist had done to her. And because of it she had made a serious discovery.

Mr. Einstein was wrong on several points. Ought she to tell him?

For a long time she sat there at her library table; and her thoughts ranged far and wide over the almost limitless vista that her new abilities had opened up for her.

She was, without doubt, the strongest person in the world. The evidence she had just acquired tended to indicate that she was probably also the most intelligent person in the world. Whatever was she to do then, with all this intelligence and strength? How was she to use it? Why? Where? When? What would people think when she told them she could outrun a train?

Possibly, thought Miss Prinks, she could be useful as a sort of lady traffic policeman chasing reckless drivers. Miss Prinks shuddered a little at the thought. No, that would be too undignified, running down a street in a blue uniform at her age. Perhaps she could become some sort of government scientist. But they would probably put her to work designing some sort of super weapon. As a member of the SPCA, she simply could not do it. Possibly . . .

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A bell rang through the library, notifying all and sundry that the 7 o'clock closing hour had arrived. Still deep in thought, Miss Prinks rose to her feet, returned her books and made off in the direction of her apartment.

She had thought away the last hours of the afternoon and twilight was closing down. In the soft dwindling light, she took her way down the almost deserted street, across the railroad bridge (no train this time, thank goodness) and past the closed shops on her way toward home.

She left the bridge behind her and went on in a careful imitation of her usual walk. She had half a block to go to reach the safety and peace of the green rug, the gold lace curtains, the grandfather clock and Solomon, the cat.

And it was then that the purse-snatcher got her.

He came diving out of the shadows of the narrow alleyway between the pet shop and the hardware store, seconds after Miss Prinks had inched her way past. A few quick running strides brought him up to her — a tall, heavy youth with a scared face and breath whistling fiercely through his straining, open mouth. With one sudden twitch, he pulled the purse from her arm, tucked it under his own and was away at a dead run down the block.

Now, of course, with her super-hearing, Miss Prinks should have heard his breathing and the pounding of his heart as he waited for her in the alley. With her super-intelligence, she should have instantly divined that he was after the contents of her purse; and with her super-reactions she should have sidestepped and tripped him up quite neatly.

Unfortunately, just like any ordinary mortal, Miss Prinks had become absorbed in her own thoughts; and the purse-snatcher took her by surprise. In fact it was a good 8.7326 seconds, as she later shamefacedly admitted to herself, before the fact registered on her that she had been robbed. When it *did* register, she reacted without thinking. With one super-leap she overtook the youth and snatched at his jacket.

It ripped away from him like so much tissue paper. Frantic with the thought that he might escape, Miss Prinks grabbed again, this time coming away with half his shirt and undershirt. Her fingers were ripping through the left leg of the purse-snatcher's heavy work-pants when sanity returned to her. She gasped, stared once at the half-denuded figure fainting before her, and ran.

So, in a third story apartment on a certain street, Miss Prinks still lives. She is still a singleton aunt on a pension, and she still has gold lace curtains on the window, the green carpet on the floor and wine-colored upholstery on her furniture. The grandfather clock and Solomon are intact and present.

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She does her housecleaning in the morning, her shopping in the afternoon, and still visits the library late in the day, on nice days.

But she never goes in the science room; and she never requests Mr. Einstein's book again. Sometimes, in the evening when she has finished supper at home, she will sit down in her favorite chair to see what the news is. Then, with hands that are capable of crumpling three-inch steel plate, she picks up the evening paper. From the table beside her chair she picks up glasses and fixes them firmly in front of eyes that can see a fly crawling up a window pane two miles away. And, with a perception that is capable of scanning and memorizing a page at a glance, she plods through the news stories, word by word.

And sometimes she comes across an item on the front page reporting the construction of an atomic airplane, or a new discovery of medical science, or a release on the latest Air Force rocket — or on flying saucers. When this happens she reads it through, then shakes her head a little, then smiles. But that is all. She puts the paper down again and goes to bed.

For Miss Prinks made up her mind in that split second of realization that came to her in the heat of her flurry with the purse-snatcher. For the first time she had put her newly acquired powers to use; and in that moment she realized that it never could be.

For perhaps it would benefit the world to have a Miss Prinks who can outrun an express train, jump over the Empire State Building or correct the Theory of Relativity. These things might be good and they might not. Miss Prinks does not know.

But there is one thing she does know. And it is the reason the world will never see Miss Prinks doing any of these things.

For Miss Prinks is a lady; and such goings-on are far too dangerous. There is no doubt about it; and you are just wasting your breath if you try to argue with her. For there is too great a risk — far too great a risk (and Miss Prinks blushes at the memory) that such exercise of her powers might lead to another such occasion as that in which she — a lady — suddenly found herself *tearing a man's clothes off on the public street!* Further such doings are not for her.

No thank you! Not for Miss Prinks!

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In which Mr. Shaara offers what may well be the greatest rarity in science fiction: a completely new idea concerning time travel.

Time Payment

by MICHAEL SHAARA

IT WAS REMARKABLY warm for November. There was a gray haze over the lake and the sun behind it was rich and orange. I waited in the heat of the porch, fanning thick hot air into my face and gazing down absently into the coolness of the lake.

Ten minutes.

Twenty.

I looked at my watch. He would have to come soon.

And then I chuckled slightly, feeling a shiver of cool excitement. He could come back any time, Pell could. Any time at all.

I waited.

And then he came.

All of a sudden he was there on the porch, come out of nowhere. His eyes were bright and glistening, laughing. He held a fresh newspaper in his hand. He stood for a long moment looking at me and smiling, and I looked back at him smiling too, filled with awe and suspense and relief all at once.

"Where did you go?" I asked.

"1938," he said.

Now that it was done, really and truly and irrevocably done, we sat wrapt in silence, unmindful of the heat. It was a great moment, of course, but now nothing made sense anymore and we were back at the Problem.

I had a bottle ready. I poured two stiff ones and we drank to ourselves. Then we drank to the future.

"How long was I gone?" he said.

"Thirty-four minutes."

He nodded, checking his watch.

"Exactly. I just had time to go into town and buy a paper." He pushed it across the table toward me. It read *October 30, 1938.*

I grinned.

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"Not a very impressive relic."

Pell shrugged.

"First attempt. Next time I'll bring back something with a little more color. Like Cleopatra's girdle, for instance." He laughed, flushed, and then his eyes widened. "God, Tom, it's unbelievable! I saw them all, all the children and the dead ones and the neighbors I used to know. I *talked* with them. And nobody recognized me. I could have stayed longer but I was weak, I was so excited . . . it's . . . it's . . . unbelievable."

He stared out over the lake, shaking his head slowly. We were both silent for a long while.

And then we faced the Problem.

Or rather, Pell did. For me it was too hot and the day was too full of wonder. But we had worked and thought for many, many days, never really believing that a man could travel in time, and now of course Pell *had*, and therefore there was the Problem.

"Well," Pell said at last, "what about the future?"

I gestured weakly with my glass.

"To hell with it. Let it come."

"But it already has."

Pell lay back in his chair, smiling quietly, holding his glass to the light.

"The future exists," he said. "It exists *now*, Tom, just as the past exists now. That's proven. We've proved it ourselves."

"All right," I muttered, taking a long deep cool one.

"But if *we* have time travel," Pell went on slowly, "then obviously men in the future have time travel. They will be able — *are* able to come back."

He paused, tinkling his glass absently.

"Tom," he said, after a while, "where are they?"

I tried to let the question pass, to feel the warm sun and the pride of achievement. But I couldn't. There was something vaguely, weirdly wrong. For years Pell and I had worked with time travel, and all that discouraging time we had hunted for evidence — any evidence — that it could be done, that men had actually traveled in time. Because of course, if it *could* be done, then it would have been done already. But we never found a thing. Nowhere in history — and we searched for years — was there a single believable case of a visitor from another time. There were certain unexplainable incidents — like the famous two ladies of the Tuilleries — but never anything at all that might have come from the future. And although it had been maddening then, it was worse now. Because now we actually had time travel, and if we had it, so did the future. But . . . where were they?

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"Well, obviously," I said, breaking the long silence, "they must be visiting us all the time, and we don't know about it."

Pell shook his head strongly.

"No," he said, "there is no evidence. And it's much too big a thing. There are too many years ahead, too many billions of them. Somewhere, sometime, they would have to betray themselves."

I shifted uncomfortably in my chair. The whole thing was too complex, much too incredibly involved for a man to understand. And in the midst of it, caught like a fly in the tangled threads, was a vague bulbous fear I could not define.

But God! I thought, coming suddenly to myself. How could we sit here brooding on the world's finest day? I jumped up from my chair.

"Oh good Lord, man, let it pass!" I shouted, snatching at the lovely newspaper and waving it before Pell's eyes. "We've done it, we've done it, after all those years! Man, man, we've conquered Time!"

I began to pace back and forth excitedly as the living reality of what we had accomplished began to come home now for the first time. I wanted to go myself. With a great warm yearning, more than anything else in the world, I wanted to go myself. They were all there waiting — great God! how many were waiting! My brother, who died in the war. My mother, young and in peace before her sickness came . . .

It was while I was thinking all these things, phrasing the words I would say and planning the places and the times of my visits, that Pell discovered the answer.

"Listen," he said abruptly. At the sound of his voice I stopped pacing and looked at him. His face was white, stunned. He stared dazedly out toward the lake, toward where the machine stood gleaming in the afternoon sun.

"We can't use it," he said.

I stared at him.

He rose and walked to the door, speaking slowly and numbly.

"We'll have to destroy the Machine."

I was too shocked to move. I think I began to stutter, but Pell cut me off.

"Tom. No one has ever come back from the future. Not even *us*, Tom. Not anybody at all. There's only one reason, do you see?"

He paused.

"Nobody has come back because there's nobody there. There is no future."

After a long moment, a long exploding moment, I sat down. My fingers crumpled the newspaper. I did not even begin to argue, because I realized at last that this was the tangle in the web, the thing I had seen but had tried to ignore. It was true, I believed it. I sat in a daze.

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"Somewhere up ahead," Pell was saying, "Man stops. It must be very soon. It must be —" He broke off and shook his head quickly, turned to me.

"All the while we were building this thing, all the while we were dreaming about it, did it ever once occur to you what a weapon it was? The Time Machine — a weapon! The Ultimate Weapon. You can't detect it, you can't anticipate it. You can't screen it out. The man who owns it controls space and time and the world. If we pass this thing on, it goes into the future. Into a future nobody comes back from."

He sat for a long while in silence.

Eventually I said, groping:

"How do you know it's the Machine that's responsible? It might be a war that happens tomorrow. It might be — " I glanced involuntarily at the low red sun — "it might even be that the sun turns nova."

Pell reached down and picked up his glass, from which the ice was long gone.

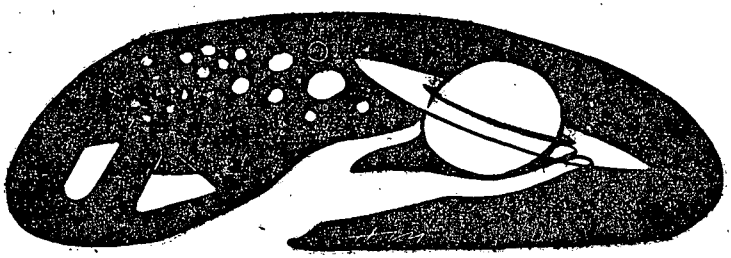
"We can't know. All we know is that if the future has time travel there are no men in it. If the future does not have time travel perhaps it is there right now, alive, secure. What can we do? Man has ten billion years to live. We can't pass on the Machine."

"But all the work, all the years . . ."

"All useless," Pell said. His voice was low and thick, but very steady.

"If we are wrong, there is only us to suffer. If we are right, . . . other men will undoubtedly make the same discovery, will do — have already done — the same thing down through the years. They have suppressed it — they will have suppressed it, every one of them down all the ages to come. Because the moment that a man fails to suppress it . . ." Pell shook himself. "This is too fine an evening for the end of the world."

He went quickly down the steps and over the hot grass toward the Machine.



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Though we keep imploring Leslie Charteris to relate another science-fantasy adventure of the Saint, Mr. Charteris points out that the more nearly realistic exploits which appear regularly in a comic strip and in his own magazine are quite enough to keep him busy. But if the fantastic experiences of Simon Templar remain unchronicled, we are able to bring you a singular episode which befell Charteris himself, in such moments of Floridian leisure as he can steal from writing and editing — an oddly gentle and quiet story, unlike anything else in the Charterian Canon, with a disturbingly persuasive hint of a hitherto unknown potential in mankind.

Fish Story

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

I USED TO SEE the old man every day around Bill Thompson's place, down at Marathon, in the Florida Keys. He was almost a part of the scenery, like the mangrove islands off shore or the pelicans that wheeled lazily back and forth and sat out on the sand bar at low tide. He didn't keep much busier than they did, either. Sometimes he'd cart off a load of trash, or trundle a barrow-load of ice out to one of the boats. But mostly he'd just be standing or sitting around on the pier or beside the pool, staring into the water.

I couldn't have guessed just how old he actually was. His rather shapeless figure, in patched and faded khaki dungarees, didn't have either the corpulence or emaciation of decay, and his slouch suggested laziness or relaxation rather than decrepitude: when he had to, he could move about as well as anyone. But he could have passed for anything from 55 to 90.

He didn't talk much to anyone unless he had to. But when I passed him I would give him a friendly time of day, and he would always respond cordially enough. Then he would go back to staring down at the water.

It's usually pretty clear in the bay, and when it's calm you can see small fish cruising about on their aimless errands, and sometimes a conch clawing its laborious way over the bottom under its heavy shell. I looked down with the old man a couple of times, but that was about all I could see.

Once I asked him if he was looking at anything special that I was missing.

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"No, sir," he said pleasantly. "Just lookin' at the fish."

He didn't seem disposed to enlarge on the subject, so I left it at that. I've heard of bird watching, which has always struck me as a slightly eccentric but harmless pastime, so I figured there might be fish watchers too.

Next time I saw him at it, I said: "How are the fish today?"

"Fine," he said imperturbably; which was as courteous a reply as you could expect to a rather silly question.

I stood beside him for a while and looked at the fish with him. After a long while he seemed to thaw out a little in the encouraging climate of my silence.

"People could learn a lot by lookin' at fish, 'stead of talkin' about 'em so much," he volunteered. "I been watchin' 'em all my life. Started when I used to fish for a living. Figured if I watched 'em enough — how they moved about, how they et, what kind of things interested 'em — I'd know better 'n anybody how to catch 'em. I did, too. Now I just watch 'em," he concluded.

Later, I was down at the cleaning table on the dock, starting to scale a nice four-pound red snapper we'd caught that afternoon, when the old man came by. A lot of the scales were flying into the water as I scraped them off, and the mullet and needle-fish were having a field day, darting and leaping for them like kids in a shower of popcorn. The old man stood by my elbow and watched them for quite a while.

"That's a fair enough little fish you got," he said at last, nodding at the one I was cleaning. "How'd you take him?"

"Spinning."

"They been comin' in with the wells full all day," he said. "Kingfish, mostly. That all you got?"

"This is all we brought home," I said. "We had a lot of sport with a whole flock of kings, but they were all too big for just my wife and me to eat, so we turned 'em loose. We aren't greedy, and this one looked just right for dinner."

I could feel something transmitted from him almost like a gentle glow, a warmth quite different from the ordinary politeness.

"It's a pity more folks don't think like that," he said presently. "I've seen 'em come in with more fish than they an' all their friends could eat, and seen 'em throw it away. I've seen 'em kill tarpon, even, which nobody can eat an' which wasn't anything like big enough to try for a record, even, an' bring 'em in just to have their pictures taken with it."

"My wife and I only fish for fun," I said, being perfectly truthful but trying not to sound smug about it. "We just enjoy playing with them and eating one occasionally."

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"I eat 'em too," he said matter-of-factly. "They're good food."

I rinsed off the fillets I had cut from the two sides of the snapper and set them aside, and I was just starting to clean off the table when he put out his hand and picked up the strips I had trimmed from the back and the belly, with the fins and the small bones in.

"May I have these?" he asked.

It hadn't occurred to me that he might be hungry, but I had never asked what he lived on.

"Here," I said, "these fillets are quite big, and we aren't big eaters. Why don't you take one of them?"

"No," he said, "I was just going to feed the bonefish."

In Bill Thompson's swimming pool, which is nothing but a big hollow blasted out of the coral rock in front of the cottages, where anybody can swim without being nervous about being mistaken for a free lunch counter by some stray barracuda, there are a lot of fish, which have been caught and dumped there alive by various contributors, and which live there in a sort of natural aquarium, quite happily, since they are walled in by a ring of fill and the water changes with every tide. Among them are three bonefish, which any angler will tell you is the fastest and spookiest thing with fins; but these three have become so domesticated and used to people that they just cruise up and down the shallows along the shore and look up at you beguilingly like spoiled puppies hoping for a handout.

I walked over to the pool with the old man and watched him feed the bonefish. He broke the trimmings up with his fingers and threw them carefully, aiming them so that the fish had to keep racing for them. Sometimes he chewed a small piece himself.

"See how they swim?" he said.

"Just like fish," I said.

"That's the only way to swim," he said. "Most everybody these days thinks he can swim, but they don't know nothin' about it. Like you. You think you swim pretty good. I've watched you."

"Oh, I just get along," I said rather huffily.

"You don't know the first thing about it," he said dispassionately. "No more 'n anybody else. I see 'em all splashin' about, kickin' an' thrashin' like big overgrown beetles. All the fish must look at 'em an' laugh fit to split their sides."

"Well," I said, hoisting my fillets, "I'm going to run along and have the last laugh on this one, anyway."

I went into our cottage and found Audrey already clean and shining like a schoolgirl, the way she always looks after a shower.

"I'm starved," she said. "Whatever kept you?"

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"Taking a swimming lesson," I said. "The old geezer thinks I swim like a beetle. He watches fish all the time, and he knows the difference."

Picking up my mail at the office next morning, I asked Bill Thompson about him.

"Old Andrew?" Bill said with a grin. "He's quite a character. Been around here ever since anyone can remember. Used to be the best fishing guide in these parts, too, once upon a time."

"What stopped him?" I asked.

"I don't really know. They say his wife took out in a skiff once to pick up some lobster traps; somehow the boat tipped over, and she was drowned. She couldn't swim. Andrew went on a long drunk and never fished again. That's one story, anyway. Maybe it did have something to do with getting him touched in the head. But he's harmless. I give him a few odd jobs, and he makes enough to live on and get drunk once or twice a week. He's happy as long as he can hang around the dock and look at the fish."

Late that afternoon, Audrey, who pampers me demoralizingly, came and put her arms around my neck and insisted that I knock off the writing I had been doing and come with her for a swim.

"The water's like glass today," she said. "Let's take the snorkels."

We have a couple of French diving masks with built-in breathing tubes, which we call snorkels and which are the latest and best thing of their kind. The mask fits over the whole face, and you breathe naturally through the nose, instead of having to hold a tube in your mouth like the contraptions most skin divers are still using. You can't go down deep with them, like with an aqualung, but you can paddle around face down on the surface indefinitely, without ever having to come up for air, and look down into the water as if into an aquarium. This is almost our favorite pastime, and in clear warm water we can spend hours at it.

The old man was standing by the pool again, and he watched us put this gear on our heads and go in. He was still watching, after however long it was, when we came out.

"Pretty fancy helmets you got there," he remarked.

"We like them," I said — perhaps a little brusquely, because I was still ridiculously peeved about his contempt for my swimming.

"I seen spear fishermen with things like that," he said calmly. "Only not so fancy. It all comes to the same thing, I guess. Just makes it easier for 'em to go in an' kill fish."

"Is that worse than catching them on a line?" I asked.

"It is," he stated. "You catch a fish on a hook, an' he gets away, or you cut him off, the hook rusts out an' he's none the worse. A fish gets away with one o' them spears in him, an' he's goin' to die, or the other fish 'll kill him,

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an' do no good to nobody. Then they'll go down an' spear a grouper in a hole, say, an' he thrashes around an' stirs up all the spawn that may be settin' there, an' that means a lot more little fish that ain't never goin' to be born."

"We don't really spear fish," Audrey said. "They look so pretty in the water, I just hate to see him even trying to shoot at one."

"So I gave it up," I said. "I never was much good at it, anyway. And we get as much fun out of just looking at them."

Again I felt that invisible glow that seemed to come out of him when you said something that fitted in with his ideas.

"I suppose you wouldn't let me try on one o' them things?" he said.

"Sure," I said.

I put it on for him and showed him how he had to keep his head forward so that the shut-off valve wouldn't cut off his air. He stood for a minute getting the feel of it; then, without taking off even his shirt, he walked out into the water and started swimming.

We watched for a little while, and Audrey said: "Well, you've made a friend. I'm going in and get the first shower. Don't stay all night."

She went in, and I stayed and watched the old man for a long time. He swam around very slowly and cautiously, like a frog. At last he came out and took the helmet off.

"It's mighty nice," he said.

Now that I had him weakened, I couldn't resist getting in the dig I had been saving up.

"I've been thinking," I said, working up to it, "about what you said about swimming."

"You have?" he said innocently.

"Yes," I said. "How would *you* say people ought to swim?"

"They ought to look at the fish," he said. "See how a fish swims. No flailin' around. Just a little wiggle, an' it *glides* through the water. Look at the animals that really know how to swim. Look at seals. Look at an otter. They don't swim like people. They swim like fish."

"They're also built more like a fish," I pointed out. "People have got awkward things like arms and legs, and not enough joints to wiggle with."

"All right," he said. "But they could try. Take your two arms. Make believe they're a couple of eels, an' make 'em go snake-like, like an eel swims, from your shoulders right down to your hands. An' then your legs. You could put 'em together an' try to move 'em with your body, like a fish."

I had him now.

"So," I said, trying not to make my voice too cruel, "how come you swim like a frog?"

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He looked at me in silence, and I could feel he was hurt.

"You watched me," I said, "and I was watching you."

"That's why I wasn't doin' it right," he said. "I never like to swim right when anyone's watchin'."

"Oh," I said — too politely.

He went on staring at me with his clear depthless eyes.

"You don't believe me," he said. "Nobody believes me."

"Of course I do," I said uncomfortably.

He didn't have to be a clairvoyant to detect the hollowness of my words. He seemed to be fighting a great struggle within himself, but I could feel that it wasn't a struggle with ordinary indignation. He was sorry for himself, and sorry for me, and some infinitely pent-up frustration in him was stirring in what might have been a kind of death agony.

After what seemed like an age, he seemed to come to an epochal decision. He glanced around him almost furtively, as if afraid of being seen in commission of some dread misdeed. It was getting dark already, and there was no one around. He turned away from me and walked back into the water.

He waded in up to his waist and lay forward, floating like a log. Then — it's almost impossible to describe — he gave a queer sort of fish-like wriggle, all over, and disappeared.

It must have been a trick of the fading light, but he *had* looked rather like a basking fish going down. Nothing to it really, of course: any good swimmer can duck-dive something like that. I frowned at the area where he had vanished, expecting him to come up close by at any moment, and making a mental resolution to humor him more generously thereafter.

"Hey!"

I turned rather stupidly. I knew it was his voice. And there he was, his gray head bobbing above the water at the far end of the pool.

I didn't literally rub my eyes, but I felt like doing it. It seemed only a few seconds since he had gone under. I knew that my thoughts had been wool-gathering, and obviously I'd simply been unaware of the lapse of time.

"Do that again," I called to him.

He flattened out and wriggled out of sight again, and this time I counted, keeping a deliberate rhythm: *Thousand-one*, *thousand-two*, *thousand-three*, *thousand-four*. . . .

I'd just gotten that far, meaning four seconds, when there was a swirl in the water right at my feet, and the old man stood up out of it, shaking himself like a big dog, and plodded up the crushed coral slope to face me.

"Now, you've seen it," he said. "If I die tomorrow, somebody seen it."

Without another word he trudged away into the deepening twilight, dripping water; and I went slowly into the cottage.

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"Did you learn anything?" Audrey asked brightly.

"Yes," I said. "I found out I need my eyes examined. Or maybe my head."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing," I said. "The old boy can see more in fish than I can. But maybe he's the one that's cracked, and not me."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," she said mischievously; and I laughed and was glad I could turn it off, because I wasn't ready to talk about what I'd seen. Or thought I'd seen. I was afraid I actually had suffered some kind of hallucination.

It haunted me before I fell asleep, though, and again when I woke up in the morning. I could remember exactly how I'd counted the seconds, with that trick of saying "thousand" in between which helps to keep them spaced evenly: it beat in my head like a metronome. I checked it against my watch, and it came out right on the nose.

Audrey always likes to sleep a bit late when we're on vacation, so I swallowed some breakfast and went out by the pool. I knew it was a good big swimming hole, but perhaps my eye for distance was a little vague. I paced it off carefully, from the point opposite where the old man had been when he started his last swim to the place where I knew I'd been standing. Then I shook my head and paced it over again. It came out the same.

Even if I'd faced jail for perjury, I couldn't have made it any less than fifty yards.

Fifty yards in four seconds would mean a hundred yards in eight seconds, if he could keep it up. And he hadn't seemed in the least winded when he came out.

But a hundred yards in eight seconds is a second faster than the fastest human has ever *run!*

In eight seconds, a hundred yards, that's three hundred feet, that's thirty-seven-and-a-half feet a second. Sixty miles an hour is eighty-eight feet a second (I remembered that without having to work it out, from a story I'd written involving an automobile accident). Eighty-eight into thirty-seven gives you a little more than forty percent, meaning that his speed was better than twenty-four miles an hour. That's a good clip for a twin-engine express cruiser.

I've heard that porpoises have been timed at a speed up to seventy-five miles an hour. But a man — an *old man.* . . .

My head was swimming a little.

The old man had come up beside me from somewhere, silently. He had a handful of shrimp heads, and he was tossing them one by one to the fish.

"You ain't dreaming," he said, without taking his eyes off them. "You saw it."

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"Would you do it again?" I asked.

"No."

"Haven't you ever thought," I said, trying not to disturb him with my excitement, "you could be one of the wonders of the world. You could break every swimming record that's ever been set. They'd pay you thousands of dollars to put on exhibitions. You could revolutionize the whole sport of swimming. Athletic coaches would pay you a fortune for your secrets —"

"I don't aim to make a spectacle of myself," he said. "And the only person I ever wanted to teach how to swim, just wouldn't learn."

"I heard about that," I said gently. "But somebody else might learn, and it might save his life."

"Anybody who wants to learn bad enough, can learn," he said with the stubbornness of his years. "*You* could learn, if you wanted to, and if you didn't think you knew it all already. All you have to do is forget everything they taught you, and just watch the fish. Try to feel like a fish, an' move like a fish, 'stead of kickin' about like a drownin' cockroach, an' one day it'll just come to you, sudden an' quiet like. But I wouldn't tell nobody. Next thing you know, everybody'd be out with them gol-darned spears, swimmin' like fish an' seein' how many they could kill."

He tossed in the last shrimp head, wiped his hands on his jeans, and stood there just looking at the bonefish cruising back and forth. I wished in vain that some inspiration would tell me how to penetrate his quiet obduracy.

"You know," he said, "folks don't give fish enough credit. What do they call somebody they're contemptuous of? A poor fish. Poor fish, my eye. Fish are a lot better off than most people. They've always got something to eat, even if it's each other, an' they don't need no money or clothes or machinery. They don't even have to worry about the weather. Down there just a few feet under it's always calm even in the worst storm, it doesn't rain or blow, it doesn't get hotter or colder. Sometimes I wonder why any creatures ever wanted to crawl up out of the water an' live on land, like evolution says they did. Sometimes I think we'd a been a lot better off improvin' our race by stayin' down under the sea. An' one o' these days, maybe some of us 'll go back to it."

"We're hardly fitted for that now," I said, to keep him talking, "unless we could get our gills back."

"What about whales an' porpoises?" he said. "They breathe air, just like we do, but they spend all their lives in the sea an' never come up on land. How do they do it? Well, they don't try to stay on the top all the time, an' wear theirselves out, like human bein's do when they're scared of drownin'. They just relax an' let 'emselves go down, an' just push 'emselves up when

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they want to get a breath. A lot o' folks wouldn't get drowned if they only did that. They could stay in the water all day and night if they wouldn't fight it. I know. I spent two whole summers up at Marineland, that big aquarium they got near St. Augustine, just watchin' the porpoises through the glass windows. I just about got the feel of it myself. Any day now, maybe, I'll be sure I can do it like they do. An' then I'll go out an' be with them all the time — like some other folks have, I reckon."

It was absurd, but he was so utterly earnest that a little chill riffled through my hair.

"Other folks?" I repeated.

"That's right," he said, almost belligerently. "You ever hear of mermaids?"

"I never heard of one being caught."

"You ain't likely to. They're too smart. But they been seen."

"Manatees," I said. "That's what the old-time sailors saw, perhaps with a bottle of rum to help them. They just thought they looked human, and took it from there."

"I'm talkin' about mermaids," he said. "Not things with fish tails, but people who learned how to be like fish or porpoises. Like I aim to do; an' it won't be so long from now."

Then I knew that his poor old brain was really adrift, even if he had discovered some strange new trick about swimming; and I was almost relieved to see Audrey coming across towards us.

"Good morning," she said to him cheerfully. "Are you giving my husband some good advice?"

"I been tryin' to, ma'am," he said gravely. "But I don't think he believes me. Maybe you'll both find out, one o' these days. You're young, but you got the right things in your hearts. That's why I talked more to him than I ever talked to nobody yet. An' you" — he looked at me again — "bein' a writin' feller, perhaps one day you'll tell folks that old Andrew wasn't quite as crazy as they thought."

He tipped his cap and slouched unhurriedly away.

"What *is* the bee in his bonnet?" Audrey asked.

"It isn't a bee," I said. "It's a minnow."

And I told her all about it.

"Poor old guy," she said. "Losing his wife like that must have really done it to him. . . . But of course he couldn't actually have swam as fast as you thought he did. You must have lost count, or something."

"I must have," I said, and was glad to drop it there.

It was a dead-calm day, so we took a boat out to the ocean reef and went snorkeling there. I had never found fish so fascinating to watch.

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We didn't see the old man again, but other people did, they said later. He was in every bar in town, making no trouble, just drinking steadily and not talking to anyone, but he could still walk straight when they last saw him. In the morning, they found his clothes and shoes and cap and an empty pint bottle on Bill Thompson's dock, and that was all. It seemed as if he must have gone swimming in the night, and then the liquor had overpowered him and he hadn't come back. The tide didn't bring him in, and the fishing boats kept a lookout for his body for days, but it was never found. Finally they figured that the barracuda or the morays had probably finished it.

Audrey and I missed him around the dock, and felt strangely depressed about the manner of his going. It seemed as if he should have had a happier ending, somehow. But how could that have been possible?

It was several days later, sunning ourselves beside the pool, that we both looked at each other suddenly with the same complete telepathic agreement. Audrey jumped up and pulled on her bathing cap.

"Come on," she said. "I'll race you the length of the pool."

Audrey is slim and utterly feminine, but she can go through the water in a way that, to my chagrin, always takes my best efforts to keep up with. I still didn't have all my heart in the race at first, and about half-way she was a length ahead of me. I put my head down and started to work.

And then, somehow, I was still thinking about the old man, and thinking about the fish I'd looked at, and I could see in my mind the funny sort of wiggle the old man had made when I watched him, and I seemed suddenly to feel it with all my body, and I was just silly enough to try it. . . .

After a moment I looked up to catch a breath and see how I was doing. This just saved me from banging my head on a rock at the end of the pool. Audrey, going like a young torpedo, was about fifteen yards behind.

When she joined me on the beach her eyes were big and round.

"Why, you old so-and-so," she sputtered. "So you've been holding out on me ever since I've known you!"

"Never," I said.

"Making believe I could almost beat you," she fumed, "when all the time you could swim like —"

"A fish," I said, and put a finger on her lips.

Sometimes we hardly seem to need to say a word to each other. It's a way two perfectly normal people can get when they've found complete harmony with each other. But she had to finalize it.

"I know it's impossible," she said, "but do you suppose . . ."

"Of course it is," I said. "But let's think it."

But we never swim like fish where anybody can see us. And very seldom even when we know we're alone. Somehow, it has us a little scared.

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Until we read this brief story by Andre Norton we had concluded that a generation of writers, beginning with Stanley G. Weinbaum and coming up to the present day with Ray Bradbury and Arthur C. Clarke, had just about exhausted the possibilities of Mars as a locale for science fiction. With this wholly convincing account of the weird and lovely things Terran explorers (and racketeers) may find on the Martian deserts, Miss Norton, noted hitherto for her tasteful anthologies and admirably conceived novels of the far future, not only proves us wrong but makes a proper place for herself right up there with Messrs. Clarke and Bradbury. Make room, gentlemen!

Mousetrap

by ANDRE NORTON

REMEMBER THAT old adage about the man who built a better mouse trap and then could hardly cope with the business which beat a state highway to his door? I saw that happen once — on Mars.

Sam Levatts was politely introduced — for local color — by the tourist guides as a "desert spider." "Drunken bum" would have been the more exact term. He prospected over and through the dry lands out of Terraport and brought in Star Stones, Gormel ore, and like knickknacks to keep him sodden and mostly content. In his highly scented stupors he dreamed dreams and saw visions. At least his muttered description of the "lovely lady" was taken to be a vision, since there are no ladies in the Terraport dives he frequented and the females met there are far from lovely.

But Sam continued a peaceful dreamer until he met Len Collins and Operation Mousetrap began.

Every dumb tourist who steps into a scenic sandmobile at Terraport has heard of the "sand monsters." Those which still remain intact are now all the property of the tourist bureaus. And, brother, they're guarded as if they were a part of that cache of Martian royal jewels Black Spragg stumbled on twenty years ago. Because the monsters, which can withstand the dust storms, the extremes of desert cold and heat, crumble away if so much as a human finger tip is poked into their ribs.

Nowadays you are allowed to get within about twenty feet of the "Spider

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Man" or the "Armed Frog" and that's all. Try to edge a little closer and you'll get a shock that'll lay you flat on your back with your toes pointing Earthwards.

And, ever since the first monster went drifting off as a puff of dust under someone's hands, the museums back home have been adding to the cash award waiting for the fellow who can cement them for transportation. By the time Len Collins met Sam that award could be quoted in stellar figures.

Of course, all the bright boys in the glue, spray and plastic business had been taking a crack at the problem for years. The frustrating answer being that when they stepped out of the rocket over here, all steamed up about the stickability of their new product, they had nothing to prove it on. Not one of the known monsters was available for testing purposes. Every one is insured, guarded, and under the personal protection of the Space Marines.

But Len Collins had no intention of trying to reach one of these treasures. Instead he drifted into Sam's favorite lapping ground and set them up for Levatts — three times in succession. At the end of half an hour Sam thought he had discovered the buddy of his heart. And on the fifth round he spilled his wild tale about the lovely lady who lived in the shelter of two red rocks — far away — a vague wave of the hand suggesting the general direction.

Len straightway became a lover of beauty panting to behold this supreme treat. And he stuck to Sam that night closer than a Moonman to his oxy-supply. The next morning they both disappeared from Terraport in a private sandmobile hired by Len.

Two weeks later Collins slunk into town again and booked passage back to New York. He clung to the port hotel, never sticking his head out of the door until it was time to scuttle to the rocket.

Sam showed up in the Flame Bird four nights later. He had a nasty sand burn down his jaw and he could hardly keep his feet for lack of sleep. He was also — for the first time in Martian history — cold and deadly sober. And he sat there all evening drinking nothing stronger than Sparkling Canal Water. Thereby shocking some kindred souls half out of their wits.

What TV guy doesn't smell a story in a quick change like that? I'd been running the dives every night for a week — trying to pick up some local color for our 6 o'clock casting. And the most exciting and promising thing I had come across so far was Sam's sudden change of beverage. Strictly off the record — we cater to the family and tourist public mostly — I started to do a little picking and prying. Sam answered most of my feelers with grunts.

Then I hit pay dirt with the casual mention that the Three Planets Travel

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crowd had picked up another shocked cement dealer near their pet monster, "The Ant King." Sam rolled a mouthful of the Sparkling Water around his tongue, swallowed with a face to frighten all monsters, and asked a question of his own.

"Where do these here science guys think all the monsters come from?"

I shrugged. "No explanation that holds water. They can't examine them closely without destroying them. That's one reason for the big award awaiting any guy who can glue them together so they'll stand handling."

Sam pulled something from under the pocket flap of his spacealls. It was a picture, snapped in none too good a light, but clear enough.

Two large rocks curved toward each other to form an almost perfect archway and in their protection stood a woman. At least her slender body had the distinctly graceful curves we have come to associate with the stronger half of the race. But she also had wings, outspread in a grand sweep as if she stood on tiptoe almost ready to take off. There were only the hints of features — that gave away the secret of what she really was — because none of the sand monsters ever showed clear features.

"Where — ?" I began.

Sam spat. "Nowhere now." He was grim, and his features had tightened up. He looked about ten years younger and a darn sight tougher.

"I found her two years ago. And I kept going back just to look at her. She wasn't a monster like the rest of 'em. She was perfect. Then that —" Sam lapsed into some of the finest space-searing language I have ever been privileged to hear — "that Collins got me drunk enough to show him where she was. He knocked me out, sprayed her with his goo, and tried to load her into the back of the 'mobile. It didn't work. She held together for about five minutes and then —" He snapped his fingers. "Dust just like 'em all!"

I found myself studying the picture for a second time. And I was beginning to [redacted] three minutes or so. Most of the [redacted] — minus the cage — h[redacted]inst me, I wouldn't ha[redacted]ollins came back. And [redacted]ng around the dives [redacted]own and I caught up [redacted]s over one table, Sam [redacted]d Len giving him cat [redacted]ise Sam hailed me and [redacted] join them — much t[redacted] think I'm on the trac[redacted]ıg secret. He had dis[redacted]

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beyond all the sand barrier walls in Terraport, out into the dry lands. And I guessed that he wasn't telling all he knew — or suspected.

I couldn't forget that picture. The next night I was back at the Flame Bird. But Sam didn't show. Instead rumor had it that he had loaded up with about two months' supplies and had gone back to the desert. And that was the last I heard of him for weeks. Only, his winged woman had crept into my dreams and I hated Collins. The picture was something — but I would have given a month's credits — interstellar at that — to have seen the original.

During the next year Sam made three long trips out, keeping quiet about his discoveries, if any. He stopped drinking and he was doing better financially. Actually brought in two green Star Stones, the sale of which covered most of his expenses for the year. And he continued to take an interest in the monsters and the eternal quest for the fixative. Two of the rocket pilots told me that he was sending to Earth regularly for everything published on the subject.

Gossip had already labeled him "sand happy." I almost believed that after I met him going out of town one dawn. He was in his prospector's crawler and strapped up in plain sight on top of his water tanks was one of the damnedest contraptions I'd ever seen — a great big wire cage!

I did a double take at the thing when he slowed down to say good-by. He saw my bug-eyes and answered their protrusion with a grin, a wicked one.

"Gonna bring me back a sand mouse, fella. A smart man can learn a lot from just watchin' a sand mouse, he sure can!"

Martian sand mice may live in the sand — popularly they're supposed to eat and drink the stuff, too — but they are nowhere near like their Terran namesakes. And nobody with any brains meddles with a sand mouse. I almost dismissed Sam as hopeless then and there and wondered what form the final crack-up would take. But when he came [redacted] a couple of weeks later [redacted] any grudge aga[redacted]

Then Len C[redacted] tricks — hangi[redacted] had stayed in t[redacted] thick as thieve[redacted] Canal Water a[redacted]

To my surp[redacted] insisting that [redacted] skinned when [redacted] Sam spill his b[redacted]

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far surpassed the winged woman that they couldn't be compared. And Collins sat there licking his chops and almost drooling. I tried to shut Sam up — but I might as well have tried to can a dust storm. And in the end he insisted that I come along on their expedition to view this fabulous wonder. Well, I did.

We took a wind plane instead of a sandmobile. Collins was evidently in the chips and wanted speed. Sam piloted us. I noticed then, if Collins didn't, that Sam was a lot less drunk than he had been when he spilled his guts in the Flame Bird. And, noting that, I relaxed some — feeling a bit happier about the whole affair.

The red rocks we were hunting stood out like fangs — a whole row of them — rather nasty looking. From the air there was no sign of any image, but then those were mostly found in the shadow of such rocks and might not be visible from above. Sam landed the plane and we slipped and slid through the shin-deep sand.

Sam was skidding around more than was necessary and he was muttering. Once he sang — in a rather true baritone — just playing the souse again. However, we followed along without question.

Collins dragged with him a small tank which had a hose attachment. And he was so eager that he fairly crowded on Sam's heels all the way. When at last Sam stopped short he slid right into him. But Sam apparently didn't even notice the bump. He was pointing ahead and grinning fatuously.

I looked along the line indicated by his finger, eager to see another winged woman or something as good. But there was nothing even faintly resembling a monster — unless you could count a lump of greenish stuff puffed up out of the sand a foot or so.

"Well, where is it?" Collins had fallen to one knee and had to put down his spray gun while he got up.

"Right there." Sam was still pointing to that greenish lump.

Collins' face had been wind-burned to a tomato red but now it darkened to a dusky purple as he stared at that repulsive hump.

"You fool!" Only he didn't say "fool." He lurched forward and kicked that lump, kicked it good and hard.

At the same time Sam threw himself flat on the ground and, having planted one of his oversize paws between my shoulders, took me with him. I bit into a mouthful of grit and sand and struggled wildly. But Sam's hand held me pinned tightly to the earth — as if I were a laboratory bug on a slide.

There was a sort of muffled exclamation, followed by an odd choking sound, from over by the rocks. But, in spite of my squirming, Sam con-

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tinued to keep me more or less blindfolded. When he at last released me I was burning mad and came up with my fists ready. Only Sam wasn't there to land on. He was standing over by the rocks, his hands on his hips, surveying something with an open and proud satisfaction.

Because now there *was* a monster in evidence, a featureless anthropoidic figure of reddish stuff. Not as horrible as some I'd seen, but strange enough.

"Now — let's see if his goo does work this time!"

Sam took up the can briskly, pointed the hose tip at the monster, and let fly with a thin stream of pale bluish vapor, washing it all over that half-crouched thing.

"But —" I was still spitting sand between my teeth and only beginning to realize what must have happened. "Is that — that *thing* —"

"Collins? Yeah. He shouldn't have shown his temper that way. He kicked just once too often. That's what he did to her when she started to crumple, so I counted on him doing it again. Only, disturb one of those puff balls and get the stuff that's inside them on you and — presto — a monster! I got on to it when I was being chased by a sand mouse a couple of months back. The bugger got too close to one of those things — thinking more about dinner than danger, I guess — and whamoo! Hunted me up another mouse and another puff ball — just to be on the safe side. Same thing again. So — here we are! Say, Jim, I think this *is* going to work!" He had drawn one finger along the monster's outstretched arm and nothing happened. It still stood solid.

"Then all those monsters must once have been alive!" I shivered a little, remembering a few of them.

Sam nodded. "Maybe they weren't all natives of Mars — too many different kinds have been found. Terra was probably not the first to land a rocket here. Certainly the antmen and that big frog never lived together. Some day I'm going to get me a stellar ship and go out to look for the world my lady came from. This thin air could never have supported her wings.

"Now, Jim, if you'll just give me a hand, we'll get this work of art back to Terraport. How many million credits are the science guys offering if one is brought back in one piece?"

He was so businesslike about it that I simply did as he asked. And he collected from the scientists all right — collected enough to buy his stellar ship. He's out there now, prospecting along the Milky Way, hunting his winged lady. And the unique monster is in the Interplanetary Museum to be gaped at by all the tourists. Me — I avoid red rocks, green puff balls, and never, never kick at objects of my displeasure — it's healthier that way.

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In his first story, Young-Man-With-Skull-At-His-Ear *(F&SF, May, 1953), Levi Crow revealed an extraordinary gift for understanding and interpreting the traditions of those dauntless and tragic Americans, the Plains Indians. Now Mr. Crow turns from the past to the present of that betrayed people and shows us the problems of existence in a white man's world . . . and how a strong medicine can lead, not to magic, but to a science beyond that of the white man.*

Warrior In Darkness

by LEVI CROW

ILLUSTRATION BY NICK SOLOVIOFF

TO KNOW WHY Long Spear did not want a white doctor to look at his dimmed eyes, you must know Long Spear's people, the Ongwi.

They are the last Old Thinkers. On other reservations, the people wear white men's clothes and shoes and hats, they eat from plates, they have wooden houses. They sell blankets or clay pots or silver jewelry for the money of bad-mannered white tourists. But not the Ongwi.

At the end of the warpath-days, white men made a treaty, and by some miracle kept it. The Ongwi — maybe they are four tens of tens in number — live in a long mountain valley, in skin lodges. They talk as their people did in the First Times. They grow corn and, since the buffalo are long dead, they kill deer and mountain sheep. They wear buckskin shirts and moccasins and leggings, and robes of fur. Ongwi children are not shut up in schools, young Ongwi warriors are not drafted for white men's wars that nobody understands.

A man's greatest hate is for the enemy who has beaten him, and the Ongwi have never lost their silent hate for white men. They come out to trade for guns and cartridges, but they turn away missionaries who come and say not to worship the Sun Ghost. Other white men who come among them they generally do not look at or answer. Once a white man asked for the story of Strike Eye, who lived in a high mountain notch and whose look was death. Politely, the Ongwi chief pointed the way with the heel of his hand; that white fool went up the trail and of course he never came back.

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No Ongwi went to Strike Eye unless he felt ready to die, as sometimes the Ongwi felt ready and went, and were never seen again except by Strike Eye.

Long Spear was the strongest young man. He might have been talked of for chief — the Ongwi all liked him — but he hunted more than he thought, and laughed as much as he hunted.

A few years ago, the old men thought someone should learn about the white men's war, and say if the white men could be fought and killed, so that good things could come again. They sent Long Spear, because he saw far and hunted well and was not afraid. He came back in four years, with a scar on his temple and many strange stories.

He could not count all the young white men who traveled with him in iron trains, then in big boats on much water. In a land nobody had ever heard of, he had fought other white men. His white chiefs had praised him, but Long Spear laughed, the way he laughed so often. Anybody, he said, could stand safe and shoot down enemies — the brave Ongwi way, in warpath days, was to run close and strike with a weapon in the hand.

The white chiefs gave him an honor-thing for killing so many, a shiny metal piece on a blue ribbon marked with stars. He did not value it. When he came home he gave it to Tall Willow, the daughter of Angry Elk, the medicine man. She had been a child when he went away. Now she was tall and slim, like her name. Because Angry Elk had no son, she was learning to be a medicine woman.

"*Hai-Ya*," Long Spear told the Ongwi, "it is foolish to think about war with the white men. They are more than the grasshoppers in number. Leave them alone. Let's hope they leave us alone."

The old men wished they had sent someone more thoughtful than Long Spear. He made it sound as if the white men would never go away and leave the Ongwi and the other tribes to what was rightly theirs. Long Spear always stopped thinking to see things — the eyes in his high-nosed brown face were the eyes of an eagle. They spied out all things for him. They showed him deer and sheep, so high and far away that other hunters saw nothing. He spied tracks on bare ground as hard as rock, and what was a soaring dust-speck to his comrades was, to him, hawk or goose or buzzard. And so he amazed the chief one morning when the chief said it was a good day to hunt.

"You try to make me laugh," said Long Spear. "It will rain, there are dark clouds."

"No, my friend, the sun is bright," the chief told him, then looked into Long Spear's eyes and frowned. "See," said the chief, "how many fingers am I holding up?"

"Chief, you still try to make me laugh," said Long Spear. "You hold up your fist, with no fingers showing."

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The chief said nothing for a moment. Then he touched Long Spear's arm. "My friend, I do not laugh. The day is bright — you say it is dark. I hold up three fingers — you think I close my fist. Come to the lodge of Angry Elk, the medicine man."

He helped Long Spear to Angry Elk's lodge, for Long Spear's feet moved unsurely on the ground. Inside the lodge sat the medicine man, thinking what medicine men think. He heard the story, then told Long Spear to sit down. He held out a pipe with a stem painted red and green, and with colored feathers hanging to the bowl.

"What colors are these?" he asked.

"Light a fire so that I can see and tell you," said Long Spear.

"*Hai-ya*, there is a bright fire," Angry Elk told him. "Let me see your eyes — they look weary. How do they feel?"

"It is as if a hard wind has blown into them."

Angry Elk told Tall Willow to fetch one of the many medicine bags that hung to the lodge poles. From it he took dried herbs and packed them into his pipe. He lighted it and blew smoke into Long Spear's eyes. "Now, what color is the pipe stem?"

Long Spear shook his head. "Angry Elk, I cannot say."

"Then I must make strong medicine. Tall Willow, bring that pouch, and that, and that."

He mixed things into a clay bowl of water. "Drink this," he commanded Long Spear, and when Long Spear had done so, Angry Elk motioned to Tall Willow. She beat softly on a drum and Angry Elk sang a song that had come down from long ago, from the First Times.

Long Spear's head drooped, his arms fell at his sides, his breath came slowly and deeply. Then Angry Elk made another gesture, Tall Willow struck the drum hard, and Long Spear sat up and yawned.

"I am sorry," he said. "I slept, I dreamed."

"*Hai-ya*, I see that is true. What was your dream?"

Long Spear rubbed his dim eyes, and frowned. "In my dream I fought again in the white men's war. The thing happened for which they gave me that shiny thing Tall Willow has."

"You have never told us about that. Tell it now."

Long Spear's frown deepened. "It is hard to use words you know. There was a fight, in a place called Germany. There were many of my white men, and many of theirs. The noise was loud — they shot off weapons a hundred times as loud as the guns you know, and more men died at one time than there are Ongwi in this valley."

"Is this true, or is this your dream?"

"It is true, and I dreamed it as though I had gone back there. With me

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were ten warriors, or a few more, and weapons shot all around us, making big holes in the ground. In front, the German white men had a gun that shoots fast, many times, without loading. *Machine gun*, white men call it. It clears its throat at you, and many fall dead and hurt, and there is no stopping the death it sends."

He paused, remembering. "Speak on," bade Angry Elk.

"The leader of my white men said that somebody must stop that many-shooting gun. If it was not stopped, our warriors could not go forward at that place. Then all men on our side would have to stop at other places, and our fight would be lost. I said I would go. I lay flat and crawled through grass, like a snake. *Hai-ya*, those German white men did not see me. I crawled around behind them. I threw a thing — I do not know how to tell you about it. It is like a pine cone, but it is made of iron. You pull something, and throw quickly. The thing goes off and strikes many men. White men call it a *grenade*."

He was silent, and Angry Elk and Tall Willow heard his teeth come together with a click, like shifting gravel.

"Speak on," Angry Elk told him.

"My grenade threw up earth and stone, and I saw two of the German white men lift into the air, floating there a moment, as if in water. I jumped up and ran to finish them. Of the warriors there, five were dead and one was dying. Their many-shooting gun had been knocked over, and I bent to look. To the earth bank where it had been, those German white men had fastened a picture."

"What picture, Long Spear?" asked the medicine man.

"A man's face, with an angry look. The man's hair hung down above one eye, and a small patch of short hair grew under his nose, the way white men grow hair on their lips. He did not look brave, but he looked bad. On my gun's end was a knife-thing — white men say *bayonet*. I stabbed the picture through. Then the dying German warrior cried out at me, and threw a shot gun, a pistol. It hit me beside the eye, where you see the scar." He tapped his temple.

"I woke up from my dream, remembering what had happened after I was struck. I fell from that blow, but the many-shooting gun was silent. My own white men came and found me. I got up, and my head hurt, but I made the rest of the fight. That is all."

Angry Elk thought hard. Then he spoke slowly:

"That dream showed you those dead men, because something comes to you from the Dead Land. It happened in warpath days — the bad ghost of an enemy struck the man who killed him. The picture you stabbed, now. What man was that picture?"

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Long Spear touched his forehead and flung out his hand, to show that he did not know. "The Germans had other pictures like that. Maybe it was their war chief, or a spirit they worship. I did not think. It was white men's business, and I did not like it."

"It was a bad, strong medicine," said Angry Elk. "My friend, can you see better now?"

Long Spear blinked, turned his head from side to side. "No, my friend. I see worse than when I came here. The blindness is strong. It comes fast upon me."

Tall Willow let out the breath she held, in a long sigh. Angry Elk looked sad. "I cannot help you. I am sorry. Tall Willow, show him the way back to his lodge."

Long Spear felt her hand on his arm. As they left Angry Elk, Long Spear tried to look one way, then the other. Before, he had seen things as at twilight. Now it was as though night had come, with no fires and no moon. Tall Willow brought him to the lodge where he lived alone. He felt with his foot to where his bed-robes lay. He sat down to think.

Angry Elk had said he could not cure Long Spear's eyes, but there were white doctors outside. He, Long Spear, had fought the white men's war. If he asked, the doctors would look in his eyes and see — what?

He frowned to himself in his blindness. The white doctors did not believe in bad medicine sent by a dead enemy. They would try to help him, and when he still could not see, they would put him in a place called a hospital. He would have to stay there, unable to find his way around, unable to think because of the voices and smells of many white men, unable to do anything. He would be like an animal in a trap.

"This came from my own foolishness," he said to himself. "I am an Ongwi. It was not for me to fight in the white men's war. I should let them fight among themselves, and stay away and hate them."

Deep in his mind, he seemed to see the place where he had fought the German warriors with the many-shooting gun, he stabbed again at the face in the picture. It looked like a real face, it seemed to look at him and move its lip to speak. Angry Elk could not help him against the bad medicine; neither could white doctors. Then must he stay here, with eyes that were no eyes.

He could not do the good things he used to do. There would be no hunting, no prowling the ridges and heights with a gun and a knife and clear sight, no happy careful crawl to where he could aim and bring down a sheep or deer. No striding back to camp, with the animal on his shoulder, while the Ongwi admired and said, "Long Spear sees everything." No cutting up of the meat, and giving a shoulder or leg to a friend who had killed nothing.

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The sky, bright by day and spread with stars by night — that was gone. He could only remember, remember, while years and tens of years went by, until he wondered if there were a sky and a world, if the things in his mind from his young days were not only dreams.

Then he sat up and leaned his face forward into the blackness that now hung around him like a robe wrapped around his head.

"What made that noise?" he asked quickly.

"I am Tall Willow." Her voice was soft and shy. "I came, hoping you would let me come in."

Long Spear was silent. Hunting and rambling and laughing, he had not thought of women for a long time. Now, women must stay out of his mind. He could never get meat and skins for a woman. If he lived, it would be by hunters bringing meat and skins to him, as once he brought meat and skins to others.

"I have brought another medicine," Tall Willow was saying.

Long Spear shook his head in the darkness. "Angry Elk says that his medicine will not help me."

"*Hai-ya*, this medicine he decided not to use. It is strong, but it has a danger."

Inside his blind eyes, Long Spear saw his memory of her, clearer than she had been to the sight he once had. She was tall, she moved proudly and quietly, like a deer at a drinking place. Her face was gentle and good to see. Now he would never see her again.

"What danger?" he demanded.

"The medicine came to my father from his father, who got it from a medicine man of the warpath days. It calls on the Sun Ghost to help. If the Sun Ghost cannot help, then the man for whose sickness the medicine fails must die."

Long Spear thought, but only for a few moments. Then he said, "Your father did not speak of this medicine. Why do you bring it?"

"Your heart is strong, Long Spear. I think that if you cannot see, you will want to die."

"You make true talk, Tall Willow. Make this medicine for me."

He did not know what she did. It seemed that she built up a fire, and burned things that made strange smells — strong, sweet, pungent, dull-bitter. She sang, but Long Spear could not understand the words. Soon he heard a rolling rattle, like the hoofs of many little horses; it rained on the lodge. A wind rose, and the lodge shook on its poles.

He sat in darkness no longer. His blind eyes were aware of tremendous flashes of light, red, green, yellow. Listening to the song and the wind and the rain, he half felt, half saw, shadowy motions in the glaring colors, and

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for one instant had a clear look at something. It was a mountain far off, with a notch in the top, like a notch cut by the Sun Ghost's mighty hunting knife.

Then — Tall Willow stopped singing, and the wind and the rain were silent, and blackness wrapped him so closely he felt smothered.

"Look at me, Long Spear," said Tall Willow.

"I cannot see you," he said, gently.

"The medicine did not help, Long Spear." Her voice shook.

He laughed, to show her he did not fear. "But it showed me something. Strike Eye's notch in the mountains — I will go there to die."

In the earliest dawn, before the Ongwi were out of their lodges, Long Spear groped for leggings and moccasins, and wrapped his body in a fox-fur robe. He felt his way outside, and a hand touched him.

"Long Spear." It was Tall Willow's voice.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Let me lead you to the trail, and up. It is steep and rough."

"If you want to —"

"I want to," she said. "Come."

Long Spear's feet moved blindly after her, among scrubby oak brush on the slope. "How does the trail go above here?" he asked.

"It is steep for a while, then it turns and crosses the face of the mountain. At a high place, it turns back and crosses the other way."

Once or twice they had to scramble on hands and knees. Tall Willow was active, and her hand held Long Spear's arm or shoulder, guiding him always. They moved up and up, without stopping to rest, until the trail turned and became smoother and not so steep under his moccasins.

"How long must we climb?" he asked Tall Willow.

She touched his arm to make him stand still. He thought that she must be looking up, to judge the distance and the effort.

"All morning, I think," she replied. "Let us go on."

They walked ahead and upward, saying nothing for a while. Then Long Spear paused.

"Tall Willow, you press me against the rock at the left," he told her.

"*Hai-ya*, the trail is narrow."

The tightness of her voice made him turn his blind face to her. Her hand trembled on his elbow.

"Narrow," he said after her. "Let me put my hand to the trail."

"But —"

"Let me," he insisted, and she moved back. Long Spear knelt and felt to the right, to where the rock edged steeply down. He lay flat and felt

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cold wind blow on his face from underneath. From the rock at the left to where the shelf ended, the trail was hardly as wide as the length of his arm.

"How far down does it look?" he asked Tall Willow.

"Very far, many times the height of a tall pine tree. As we go up, it becomes farther down."

"You must not walk on the outside," he told her. "Walk ahead of me."

"Put your hands on my shoulders, Long Spear."

He shook his head. "No. If I fell, I might catch you and pull you down with me. I will walk with one hand on the rock face to the left, and you will lead me by my other wrist."

She pressed past him to lead the way, and he felt her body tremble as she stood for a moment above that great height he could not see. They went on.

Much higher, they rested again. Tall Willow breathed hard with the work of climbing.

"I have brought food," she said when she had caught her breath, and into his hands put a piece of pemmican. "Water, too, in this skin bag."

When they had eaten, she gave him a pipe, already lighted. To taste, without seeing the cloud of gray vapor rise, was strange. It did not satisfy.

"Tall Willow," he said.

"Long Spear?"

"You are good to help me find my death."

"I am glad to help. You have a strong heart." But she did not sound glad.

"Are you rested? Then we climb again."

They moved on, the other way up, and the rock face was against his right arm and shoulder now. His feet were careful on the trail. Once he said, "Shall we rest again?"

"Not here, not here," she said quickly, and he guessed that the trail was too narrow for stopping. They kept on, and they kept on. At last Tall Willow said, "We are at the top."

Wind blew, cold and sharp. He drew his robe close.

"Do you see Strike Eye's notch, Tall Willow?"

"It is in front of us. A narrow place opens into it, like a doorway into a lodge."

"Put my hands on the sides of that narrow doorway, and leave me."

"I will lead you in," she said, so softly that he could scarcely hear.

"Lead me in?" he said after her. "You will not." He caught her slim wrist. "Tall Willow, hear me. I came to die, not you."

"If you die before Strike Eye, I will die too," she said, very tightly, as if she stiffened her lips.

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"No," he said fiercely.

She tried to pull from his grasp, but he held tight. "This is not the way for you to think, Tall Willow. I am blind. I am no good for a woman."

"When you walk in to find Strike Eye, I will walk in with you," said Tall Willow, as bravely as a warrior.

"You will not," he said harshly, drawing her toward him so that his other hand caught her shoulder. "Tell me that you will not."

"Long Spear, I will not say it." She tried to pull free.

He let go of her wrist and sat down on the rocks.

"Say that you will not," he ordered her again, "or I will not move from where I sit. I will sit here tonight and tomorrow and forever. I will die here, without eating or drinking."

"A bad way to die," said Tall Willow, and the words shook.

"My heart is strong, I can die like that. Say that you will not let Strike Eye see you."

She was silent. Then, finally: "I say it. I will not let Strike Eye see me. I will wait here."

"You are good, Tall Willow." He rose. "Lead me to where I can walk in."

She guided him, two tens of tens of steps. "Put your hand on the rock," she made herself say. "You can feel your way in now."

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He took off his robe. The wind made his bare chest and arms tingle. He threw the robe around Tall Willow's body.

"Keep that robe," he told her. "It is a good robe."

His hand touched her face, and her soft cheek was wet. He touched her hair, and thought how black and shining it must look.

"You are good," he said. "I go, Tall Willow."

Spreading his arms, he found the two sides of the narrow open way through the rock, touching them with his hands. He guided himself into quietness. The wind was shut from him. Softly he began to sing his death song, making it up as he sang:

I go this way without being afraid.
This is my last word.
I go this way to die.
I die, but I am not afraid.

He had never thought of singing like that, not in the worst of the white men's war. He had always laughed when he fought, because he could see far, he could see to get away from death.

The narrow way through the rock turned left and then right, like a snake's path. He followed it until the two walls went from his touch. His foot pushed something, and he stooped to feel it — a round smooth thing, the bone of a man's head.

There were other bones, of legs and ribs. He stepped over them, and his moccasin came down among more bones. He stood in a place where men had died and had lain and had rotted away to bones.

Standing up, he folded his arms and lifted his blind face.

"*Hai-ya*, Strike Eye!" he said loudly. "See me and kill me, as you killed these others."

"*Hai-ya*, Long Spear," came a reply.

He did not know whether it came from his right or his left or from in front, whether it was a high voice or a deep voice. It was like no reply he had ever heard.

"Do you see me, Strike Eye?" asked Long Spear. "Why do your eyes not kill me?"

"It is because you do not see me," Strike Eye told him. "My look does not kill. When a person sees me, that person dies of the sight."

Long Spear shook his head, trying to make his thoughts clear. "I do not understand that. Is it true?"

"It has been true for a long time, ever since I came here from the star where I used to live."

"*Hai-ya*," cried Long Spear. "You lived on a star?"

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It was not unthinkable. The Ongwi told stories of Star People coming to Earth, and among the white men Long Spear had heard other things.

"From what star are you?" Long Spear inquired politely. "One nearer to the sun than this world, or one farther away?"

"My world does not belong to your sun. I have another sun, and your thoughts cannot understand the distance from that sun to yours."

Long Spear thought of white men's stories. "If you are of the Star People, you are not like a man. How big are you, Strike Eye?"

"Bigger than you. But I do not stand up like you."

"Are your legs weak?"

"I do not have legs like you, nor your sort of arms or hands," came Strike Eye's answer. "My shape is not like your shape. You call me Strike Eye, but I do not have your sort of eyes to see with. I do not have your sort of ears or mouth."

"*Hai-ya*, you must be strange." Long Spear paused — some things are too much for belief. "You say you have no ears or mouth, but you hear my talk, and you talk to me with the speech of an Ongwi."

"No." Strike Eye was patient, like an old man teaching a boy. "I think strong thoughts. They come into your thoughts, and your thoughts come into mine. That is how my people talk to each other."

Long Spear furrowed his blind face. "Strike Eye, this is a strange happening. I want to sit down."

"Sit, then," granted Strike Eye, and Long Spear squatted among the dead bones. "I know about you, Long Spear. I knew your thoughts a long time before you came here. Now I will tell you about myself."

Long Spear sat and let Strike Eye's story come into his thoughts.

Strike Eye's star was so far away that no train or ship of the white men could travel the distance in many lifetimes. But Strike Eye's people had found the way to go to other stars. It was hard for Long Spear to receive the thought for that way of travel. It seemed that Strike Eye's people made something of a metal like iron, but not iron, and that fire carried it across the great distance and guided it to another star.

"Is it like what white men call *planes?*" suggested Long Spear.

"It travels with a different power, much stronger. The white men of your world know this power, but they do not use it for good purposes — they make war with it. My traveling thing brought me here, and it struck and wrecked, making this notch in the mountain. I came out alive, I wanted to see your people. That was long ago, many times the length of the life of one of your people."

"*Hai-ya*, you wanted my people to die by seeing you?" asked Long Spear.

"I did not want to kill," Strike Eye demurred. "I wanted to help your

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people, to tell them things I know that would be good for them. But I met someone like you, and he died when he saw me."

"I still do not understand that," said Long Spear.

"My shape is not like yours. It is not bound like yours to the three limits of up and down and across. Perhaps the sight of that shape strikes your people dead when they see it."

"I begin to know that such a thing is possible," said Long Spear.

"I met others, who died when they saw me. I did not want to kill any more. I hid in this notch my traveling thing made, to keep myself from the sight of your people. I have been here since then, for many of your lifetimes. I have been alone, and sad in my loneliness."

"*Hai-ya!*" exclaimed Long Spear. "My people have had another thought about you; they did not know your heart was good." He drew a long breath. "But my journey was for nothing. I came to die."

"That is not a good thought," Strike Eye told him. "Your heart is not strong to think it."

Long Spear stood up quickly, his feet stirring the bones. "My heart is strong," he argued fiercely. "I will show you, I will walk out and throw myself down from the mountain. I am brave."

"It is not brave to die because life is not good," Strike Eye reminded him. "I know that is true, and so do you. Think of me, Long Spear. I came to this place to do good things. I have not done them. I have been alone. Only death lies around me. Yet I lived, I did not make myself die. I had a reason."

"A reason?" Long Spear sat down again. "Maybe I said a foolish thing, Strike Eye. But if I cannot see, my life is nothing. I am a burden to myself and my friends."

"You can live without seeing what other men see," Strike Eye told him. "The white men of your world see far and know much. But they are blinder than you."

"*Hai-ya*, we Ongwi do not like the white men," said Long Spear. "We hoped to fight them again some time, when they were not too strong. But I have seen that they are many, and wise. I have heard white men say that soon they will fly between stars, as you have done."

"No," said Strike Eye again. "They do not use power wisely. They play with dangerous things. The white men stand closer to death than you stood, when you were out there at the top of the cliff."

"You mean, the power to fly between stars? The power they use for a weapon?"

"Long Spear, try to see what I am sending into your thoughts."

Silence. Then it seemed that the darkness was whipped away from Long Spear, and he saw. It was immense, swift, terrible. He kept from crying out,

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for warriors do not cry out, but his blood was cold inside him, like melted snow. Picture after picture — they were sent into his thoughts by Strike Eye. Then, mercifully, they were gone, the dark came back and made him feel almost comfortable. He leaned forward.

"What does it mean, Strike Eye? I have no words for those pictures. Are they a medicine?"

"You will find words when you are used to them. I showed you how the white men kill each other, and themselves, with their great weapons and small thoughts and bad hearts."

"This is happening?"

"It begins, Long Spear. I showed you what I know is going to happen. My people do that. One with wisdom puts his thoughts into the thoughts of others."

"Does it mean that my sight will come back, Strike Eye?"

"No." Strike Eye seemed sad. "I can give you only your inner sight that sees what will come. Think of what you want to know, and the answer will come."

Long Spear felt warmth in his blood, where cold had been. "We are friends, Strike Eye, you and I. Does this mean that my people will go when the white men go?"

"Your thoughts will tell you, Long Spear."

What Long Spear saw then made him cry out at last, but joyfully. He stood up again. "It is good!" he cried.

"And I have done something of the many things I came to do in your world," came Strike Eye's answer. "I did not die because I found life was not good. I waited, until I had done something that would let me rest."

"What talk is that?" demanded Long Spear.

"You will not die. Outside here, waiting to take you down, is the girl you name Tall Willow. You can go back and tell things to your people that will help them. But first, do one thing for me."

"What, my friend?" urged Long Spear, glad to be asked.

"You will not die, but I will. I was alone. I could not die until someone took what I have made. I waited many of your lifetimes for you, for Long Spear of the Ongwi, who would take what I have made and use it for good things. That much of me will go on, with you."

"Strike Eye, my friend from the stars," said Long Spear, "don't die. Stay here. I will come back. We will talk. You will be happy."

"No," said Strike Eye again. "I have waited for my rest. I had to find someone like me, who could think like me. And when you came here, singing, I knew I had found him. You can take my thoughts for your thoughts, so that I can rest without them."

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"I was singing a death song for myself," said Long Spear.

"We, my people, know about that," Strike Eye told him. "What you call a death song is a life song to us. It means that we die, but what we lived remains to be a good thing after us."

"I do not know —" began Long Spear.

"I give you my thoughts," repeated Strike Eye. "Sing them for me in your way. I can rest then. I will know you have taken my thoughts. Sing, Long Spear."

Long Spear began to sing, and words and tune came to his lips as though by themselves:

He, my friend, came alone, he waited alone.
To see him was death, but his heart was good.
He goes, but his wise thoughts he leaves behind.
I, his friend, will keep him alive in my heart.

"A good song, Long Spear," came Strike Eye's approval. It seemed weary and faint. "Do not stop."

Long Spear sang:

He, my friend, is of the Star People.
He came from far away, but his heart is like mine.
His wisdom shall not die.
It shall be my wisdom, and after me the wisdom of my people.
He does not die, he goes to rest, to be alone no more.

"You sing the truth, Long Spear, you sing the truth. . . ."

Then, as Long Spear paused again, he heard Strike Eye at last with his ears — a slow, tired, grating sigh. Then Long Spear sat in silence so complete that it was like sleep.

He knew that Strike Eye was gone. For the time of one deep breath, Long Spear's new inner sight showed him a rocky hollow scattered with bones, and a smashed wreck of ancient metal — Strike Eye's traveling thing. Close to view, as if in front of him, a lump of dark, soft dust. That was what Strike Eye had become.

Blackness returned, and he rose, stepped over bones, groped back to the way through the rock. His spread hands guided him back.

"Long Spear! Long Spear!"

Tall Willow's voice hailed him, glad but shaking. "You did not die!"

"I did not die, Tall Willow."

"But Strike Eye —"

"He sent me back, full of wisdom. It is a strange story. I must tell the Ongwi, all of them. Let us go down, Tall Willow."

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"Your robe," and she was trying to put it around him.

Long Spear laughed joyously, and caught her in his arms and wrapped his robe around them both. Body to body they stood inside the robe, the way lovers stand. She trembled no more.

"Now," he said, his mouth against her ear. "We go down together."

The Ongwi gathered at Long Spear's call. He heard them moving, talking, as they came around him. Then they were quiet, waiting.

"I have been up the mountain," he began. "I went to where Strike Eye waited."

"*Hai-ya!*" cried a number of them at once.

"Strike Eye is dead," he went on, "but he sent a message for me to speak. My friends, my brothers, the good times will come again."

"*Hai-ya!*" came the deep-voiced chorus around him; then, the awed question of the chief: "Long Spear, is this true?"

"I tell no lie. The story is strange, but it is no lie. The white men around us are many, we cannot kill them, but — wait, I see it in my thoughts. I can tell you what I see."

The vision rose luridly. He stood silent, then he spoke:

"Spinning things, like clouds and lights, and shapes coming clear. I look at many white men's houses, a city of them, tall and strong. And in its heart rises a puff of smoke — it grows bright — it fills the sky. Now!" he cried. "It is gone, and so is the city — it is smashed, like a clay pot."

They were breathless.

"I see another thing. Many men, warriors of the white men, move with weapons on wheels, and overhead their flying things, their *planes*. Another smoke cloud swallows them. It clears — there is nothing!"

"You dream, Long Spear," stammered someone.

"No. It will be like that. Their own weapons will destroy them, will kill those who use the weapons as well as those who are struck by them."

"Long Spear sees true things," said Angry Elk, the medicine man. "I know they are true. But what about our people. Do they die, too?"

"I see again," said Long Spear, slowly.

"You see? What do you see?"

"It is a prairie, bright with sun, stretching everywhere. Hunters are creeping along. They are Ongwi hunters, and they do not have guns, they have bows."

"Like the First People," half-whispered the chief.

"They send arrows at something big and black and alive — I have not seen a thing like that, bigger than a deer, with horns and black curly hair on its head and shoulders —"

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"Buffalo!" shrilled one of the oldest men. "The buffalo will come again!"

"Then?" urged Angry Elk, close to him. "See more things for us, Long Spear."

Long Spear threw his arms wide, trying to measure what he saw in his thoughts.

"We, the Ongwi, who have not forgotten the wisdom of the First People," he said. "We come back to our own lands. And the other tribes will remember — our friends, the sons of the Arapahoe, the Atsina, the Piegan — even our ancient brave enemies, the Lakotah, the Tsi-Tsi-chah —"

"You see that?" they were prompting him eagerly.

"*Hai-ya*, I see that! The war parties riding at each other, the young braves doing bold things to win honor! The good wars we used to have, not the wars that eat up all things like the white men's wars!"

War shouts rose among the men of the Ongwi.

"The grass will grow up," said Long Spear, "the trees along the rivers. The buffalo herds return, yes, more than I can count. There will be deer and antelope, all kinds of birds and animals. *Hai-ya*, my friends, my brothers, I was taught to see these things by Strike Eye! They will be good things!"

"Long Spear! Long Spear!" they cried to him from all sides.

Darkness was back on him, like a robe of dignity. "What is it?" he asked from the darkness.

"Long Spear, your eyes are not blind," said Angry Elk. "They turn to other things. They see what will come for us, who can see only what happens now."

"*Hai-ya*, that is true," agreed the chief. "Be great among us, Long Spear. Sit by my side and help me lead the Ongwi. Tell us these truths and make us strong."

Long Spear breathed deeply.

"Yes, I will tell you, my friends, my brothers," he promised. "It is for me to tell you. But now, I will rest awhile."

He reached out in the dark. "Tall Willow?"

Her hand took his. "I am here, Long Spear," she said, very close to him.

"We may not live until the good times," he said, "but our children will live to see them."

"Our children," she repeated, and her hand squeezed his hand tightly.

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

BOTH OF YOUR editors have long shared an intense admiration for the work of Hal Clement — to be precise, for exactly twelve years; it was in June, 1942, that our eyes popped as we read, in *Astounding*, his first published story, *Proof*. It was not only an unusually good first story, even in that Golden Age when John Campbell was discovering, month by month, most of today's best established writers; it brought off a feat we would not have thought possible: the creation of a wholly believable civilization of non-solid beings evolved in the photosphere of the Sun itself.

Clement, like most brilliant debutants, has not always been that good in later years. We were disappointed, for instance, in both of his book-length novels — NEEDLE (Doubleday, 1950) and ICEWORLD (Gnome, 1953) — which seemed overwordy and pretty heavy going. But even these were redeemed by the great and almost unique Clement virtue: the meticulously detailed and convincing presentation of a wholly alien form of life.

Our scientists, in talking of life on other worlds, stubbornly stick to the conservatism of discussing "life as we know it" — which can, of course, exist only on a world pretty much "as we know it." We have never been able to see why the creative force of the universe should be so monotonously lacking in versatility. William Blake stood in awe of One who could make both the Lamb and the Tyger; surely that immortal hand or eye has, in the endless reaches of Space, framed symmetries more fearful (to us) than we can imagine.

Many science fiction writers, particularly since the days of Stanley Weinbaum, have invented ingenious forms of life as we cannot know it; but none has succeeded so well as Clement in making this invention an act, not of abstract imagination, but of pure scientific reason. And now Clement has brought forth his most impressive long piece, the novel MISSION OF GRAVITY (Doubleday, $2.95).

The postulate here is that Mesklin, the planet of a double sun some eleven lightyears from our Sol, is not spherical but almost disc-shaped, so that its gravity ranges from a mere three times that of Earth at the equator to an overpowering 700 *g* at the poles. There are other factors

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involved, too — oceans of methane, an atmosphere largely of hydrogen, exceedingly low surface temperatures and high atmospheric pressures, a period of rotation so rapid that a "day" is only some twenty of our minutes; and the fictional question posed is: granted all of these factors, what type of intelligent life will have evolved, and what sort of civilization, culture, and psychological attitudes will it possess?

The fictional frame for this speculative essay involves contact between an Earth expedition and a shrewd Mesklinite adventurer, with each maneuvering to obtain advantages from the other. Of much the same length as Clement's previous novels, it's far more compact and unified, with a good deal of adventurous excitement as the Mesklinite explores strange parts of his planet as unfamiliar to him as to his Terran advisers. But the fiction, though satisfactory, is of secondary interest; this is (a rarity these days) a science fiction novel in which the operative word is *science*. Do not expect to toss this off as the light pastime of an hour or two; it demands (and deserves) the same word-by-word attention which you would bestow upon a serious piece of non-fictional scientific speculation. A fair amount of the newly converted science fiction audience may find this too advanced a postgraduate course for their tastes (though they should at least sample it); old hands should take it to their hearts as a splendid specimen of *science* fiction in the grandest of grand manners.

The month's review copies include further novels from three of the acknowledged masters of *science fiction* (stress on *both* words), of whom one is at his incomparable best. Arthur C. Clarke's PRELUDE TO SPACE (Gnome-Ballantine, $2.50 hardcover, 35¢ paper) has hitherto appeared only in a relatively small paper edition (Galaxy Novels, 1951); but aficionados have ranked it as a classic — an almost plotless but intensely moving, human and poetic exposition of the steps immediately preceding the launching of the first manned moon rocket. The present slightly rewritten edition (the only significant change is an improved method of fueling) should enable it at last to reach its proper audience — which includes everyone from the most uninformed novice to the most jaded specialist.

REVOLT IN 2100 (Shasta, $3.50) is the third volume in Robert A. Heinlein's Future History series, and something of a disappointment. Most of the book is devoted to the 1940 *Astounding* serial, "IF THIS GOES ON —". This is, we're afraid, not major Heinlein; the idea of a religious dictatorship in the near American future is good — but a fictional religion, if it is to carry conviction, needs to be worked out with as much careful detail as one of Clement's alien worlds, and this Heinlein has not even tried to do. The new version is completely rewritten, with awkward

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results; you'll find pages worthy of the mature 1954 Heinlein (such as you'll read elsewhere in this issue) followed immediately by passages from the author's literary apprenticeship (the original novel was published only six months after Heinlein's first printed story). Impressive in its time and important in the historic development of modern science fiction, this group of stories (including the much better novelet *Coventry* and the quite unfortunate short story *Misfit*) is somewhat below the level which the name Heinlein now guarantees. S. Fowler Wright's SPIDERS' WAR (Abelard, $2.75) is merely a mistake by a great but now very old man; one's quarrel is not with the author but with the publishers who felt that the Name justified its publication.

As readers of F&SF, you are of course familiar with most of THE SINISTER RESEARCHES OF C. P. RANSOM (Doubleday, $2.95); but we still strongly urge you to buy H. Nearing, Jr.'s first published book because *a*) it includes two new stories; *b*) we, who know the old stories by heart, found ourselves chortling aloud once more upon this *n*th rereading; and *c*) Mr. Nearing has contrived an entertaining frame device and rewritten each of the stories to fit it, so that the result is (with the possible exception of Simak's CITY) the best-unified series of shorts yet presented as a quasi-novel.

Surprisingly, there are no new science-fantasy anthologies this month; but we've just received for belated review an entry from late 1953: Groff Conklin's CROSSROADS IN TIME (Permabooks, 35¢). It's an admirably balanced collection, proving that Mr. Conklin can with one hand pluck interesting items from the newest magazines (including two stories from recent F&SF's, by Chad Oliver and Idris Seabright) and with the other delve into his back files and come up with eminently reprintable stories which other anthologists have overlooked (including another of Clement's admirable studies of alien life-forms). Some of Conklin's other books, particularly his patterned series for Vanguard, have included stories of greater brilliance and individuality than any here; but the average of the volume is unusually high, and its enormous size (16 short stories and 2 novelets, totaling 125,000 words!) makes it the best bargain now on the newsstands.

As a matter of fact, the newsstands are full of bargains right now. Healthy signs: The seven most recent science-fantasy reprints come from seven different reprint publishers — and not one of them is a dull routine commercial job. Obviously more and more reprint editors are climbing on the bandwagon, and are (so far at least) exercising more discrimination than they practise in other fields of fiction.

We unhesitatingly recommend four outstanding candidates for anyone's

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All-Time-Best list: in alphabetical order, Alfred Bester's THE DEMOLISHED MAN (Signet, 25¢), a striking tourdeforce on the scientific future of murder, its motives and its detection; John Dickson Carr's THE BURNING COURT (Bantam, 25¢), finest of all fusions of deductive puzzle and supernatural horror; Arthur Conan Doyle's THE LOST WORLD (Permabooks, 25¢), first and best of the Professor Challenger stories; and Fritz Leiber's CONJURE WIFE (Lion, 25¢), the unforgettable *Unknown* novel which makes witchcraft a scientific reality in the world of today.

And decidedly interesting, on a less exalted plane, are James Blish's JACK OF EAGLES (Galaxy Novels, 35¢), an awkwardly plotted novel containing some superlative science-fictional thinking on the implications of ESP; OUTPOST MARS (Dell, 25¢) by "Cyril Judd" (Judith Merril and C. M. Kornbluth), a well-thought-out study of possible genetic changes in Terrans on Mars; and, strangest of the lot, SALOME THE WANDERING JEWESS (Ace, 35¢) by George S. Viereck and Paul Eldridge, a mad and highly sexed historical fantasy which may not please all palates but which deserves sampling.

Nothing very exciting has appeared so far in 1954 among s. f. juveniles. Best of the lot is Murray Leinster's SPACE TUG (Shasta, $2.50), a livelier and more readable story than the first in this "To The Stars" series, with a great deal of intricately ingenious space-gimmickry — if still, in writing and characterization, quite a notch below the best of other juveniles or of Leinster's adult work. (There's a nearly perfect off-trail Leinster in the Conklin anthology reviewed here.) Victor Appleton II's New Tom Swift Jr. Adventures — TOM SWIFT AND HIS FLYING LAB, . . . HIS JETMARINE and . . . HIS ROCKET SHIP (Grosset & Dunlap, 95¢ each) — seem to us a most misguided venture, well below juvenile TV or comicbook average in crudity of prose, construction, character and ideas. Both s. f. and juvenile fiction in general have marched a long way since we were boys enthralled by the elder Swift; but Appleton II (pseudonym for a stable of twenty writers!) is unaware of the fact.

Frank Ross, Jr.'s SPACE SHIPS AND SPACE TRAVEL (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, $2.75) is better than most non-fiction juveniles on the historical background to spaceflight, both fictional and factual, but uncertain on the science of the present and the immediate future. There's little value for the juvenile reference library in a book which lacks bibliography and index, which misspells all foreign names by omitting their diacritical marks, and which can, for instance, say on p. 146, "The moon, just like the world around it [whatever that means!], is absolutely devoid of atmosphere," and on p. 150, "A faint trace of atmosphere may exist there, sustaining a crude form of plant life."

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Book collectors, as both of us know too well, are predestined victims of temptation. You may argue that Miss Lannard was not a true collector, since she wanted the books for personal reasons rather than out of pure bibliophilous passion; but the moment one says, from whatever motives, "These books I must *have," one is prey to every bargain proposed by The Tempter. With fortunate mortals, this may entail only such minor losses as the children's new shoes; but Miss Lannard's bargain was more consequential . . . and surprising.*

Mint, in d/j

by RUTH LAURA WAINWRIGHT

THE HEAT MADE her dizzy, and all the unaccustomed walking had exhausted her. Her heart moved upward in her chest, balling itself into a fist that threatened to stop her breathing. She really was getting too old for such exertion. The buildings, the passing cars, everything she looked at, wavered in the glaring sunlight.

But no matter what happened, Christine Lannard was determined that her brother Amory wasn't going to surpass her in this matter of Californiana. Four stores and no luck today. She set her lips firmly together and decided that, tired as she was, she'd try at least one more.

She could still see the smug look Amory had worn when they'd met at their cousin Edith's the week before.

"— almost thirty of the Zamorano Eighty items," he was saying when Christine's mind snapped back from Edith's new drapes, which she was mentally pricing, to what Amory was saying.

"Who has almost thirty?" Christine demanded sharply.

Surely not Amory himself, but it turned out that that was what he'd said.

"Is that all?" she snorted. "Well, if that's the best you can do, I wouldn't brag about it, if I were you." She walked away quickly, before he could ask her how many *she* had. She wouldn't, of course, have told him the truth, that she had a bare half dozen or so.

Edith's husband, Jack Henderson, had given Christine and Amory each a copy of the Zamorano Eighty for Christmas several years before. At that

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time Christine had seen no particular advantage in having a copy, and had not been interested. She read just enough of the book to find out that the 80 items listed are the ones considered basic for those who collect books about early California.

The Californiana books she possessed did not, by themselves, inspire Christine to collect more. What value did anything have if none of her friends or relatives wanted it? But Amory's desire to have such books changed the picture entirely. Now she was impelled to get more of them, to find the entire 80, if possible. She couldn't let Amory outshine her in any way, could she?

She studied the Zamorano Eighty carefully, mumbling the names to herself as she ran her finger down the pages. She decided against copying the list; reading it would make it too obvious that she was looking for something special. She would have to trust her memory.

It was dim inside this last store, and her heart was still pounding hard enough to make it difficult for her to see. She had to lean over — Christine was a tall woman — to peer at the titles of the books that were packed, row after row, spines up, on rough tables.

If only she could bring herself to touch these books, to pick them up and open them! She couldn't be sure she wasn't overlooking something good, the lettering on the covers of the old books was so blurred and worn. But it made her flesh creep with revulsion to think of handling these books that had known goodness only knew how many strange hands, hands that were bound to be filthy by Christine's standards.

Someone said, "Looking for something special, madam?"

She told him no, without bothering to look up. Naturally she wouldn't tell the clerk she was looking for Californiana items. Give herself away like that and be cheated? Not Christine Lannard. She was too shrewd for that. A week of book hunting had shown her that even the charity stores knew about the demand for Californiana.

Then the same voice said, sarcastically, and so low that for a moment she wasn't really sure he had spoken to her, "Just any old book?"

The idea of a clerk talking to a customer like that! She looked up, angry, ready to put him in his place.

But it wasn't the clerk.

There was something about the man that made Christine bristle. His hat, still on his head with no regard for good manners, was shoved jauntily back. His yellow eyes, so like a cat's, mocked her. Christine could feel herself blushing and unable to speak. Get out of this place, she told herself, but her feet paid no attention. Look away from him, have nothing to do with him! But her eyes were trapped.

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He reached past her and picked up a book from the table.

"Why don't you pick them up like this?" he asked.

Christine gulped, wet her lips, and squeaked, "They — they're so *filthy*!"

He laughed shortly. "You want them clean — in mint condition, I suppose?"

She nodded.

"Would you give a year of your life for this one — in such a condition?"

He was holding the book up against his chest, but she could make out several of the gold letters — an R, and a peculiar A, with a straight bar across the top, an RB at the bottom of the spine. The rest was hidden by his hands, but she knew what book it was. She had seen a copy of it before. She'd never cared for romantic novels, at least not since she was young, but *Ramona* was on the Zamorano list.

"A year of your life?" he repeated.

The smog was getting worse, Christine noticed absently. The smell of sulphur was dreadful. Of course she would have nothing to do with this odd man. She wanted no part of such a silly bargain. She wouldn't let him tempt her, though she didn't believe it really was a first edition. It took all her will power to get away from him and out of that store.

A year of her life, that odd man had said. She didn't want to lose a year of her life. She liked her life, and being 70, she hadn't too many years left. Her life was just the way she wanted it to be, alone in the house she'd lived in for more than half a century, having no one to get things out of place or soiled, spending her money the way she wanted, having to account to no one. Not that that man could actually take a year of her life. How could he?

After that every time she entered a used book store, she found that odd man at her elbow. And each time he tried to bargain with her, offering her such tempting items as Mary Austin's *Land of Little Rain*, Colton's *Three Years in California*, a second edition of Harte's *Luck of Roaring Camp*. A year of her life for each book, he said. She had to hurry away from each time — she wanted nothing to do with him, she kept telling herself.

All she acquired by her own efforts was a recent and more or less worthless edition of Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*. Surely Amory wasn't going to surpass her for the first time in their lives! She wouldn't let him, she'd do anything to prevent that.

In desperation she began going back to the stores she had already hunted through, hoping she would find something she had overlooked the first time. There were so many books, sometimes it made her giddy trying to single out each one, especially when she had to bend her head back to see those high up on the shelves.

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One fall afternoon she made her second visit to a used book store in Hollywood. The shop was long and narrow, with a balcony across the back. She was near the top of the steep narrow stairs, engrossed in examining the books on the wall alongside, and at the same time trying to keep from being contaminated by the filth she was forever imagining was everywhere, when the odd man came up behind her.

"I could get you Bancroft's *Works*," he said.

She hadn't been able to find them there.

"Bancroft's *Works*, all thirty-nine volumes," he said. "A year for each book."

"But they are only one item on the Zamorano Eighty list," Christine protested.

"A year for each book," he repeated. "In mint condition."

How envious Amory would be! Still, she hesitated. He was such an odd man, and he smelled so of sulphur. No doubt that was because of his occupation, whatever it might be. She didn't like being near him.

"If you don't want them, just say so. I have to ask."

"Thirty-nine years," she said. "As if, at seventy, I had that many years left!" He was just teasing her, after all.

"Ever read the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius?" he asked.

Marcus Aurelius? Now who was he? Had she read his *Meditations?* It sounded like the sort of thing people were supposed to read, properly brought up people at any rate.

"He said," the man interrupted her thoughts impatiently, "that you can't lose what you never had. You haven't had the future, have you? All you have is the past. Do you want the books?"

She nodded, though she wasn't paying much attention to what he was saying. What she wanted was the books. His little game was harmless enough, and she'd humor him.

He took Volume I from the shelf and held it out to her. She reached into her pocket for the Kleenex she always kept there to use if it became absolutely necessary for her to touch any of the old books.

"You won't need that," he said quite rudely.

She could see that now. The book really was quite clean. Just the same, she was glad she was wearing heavy cotton gloves.

She thanked him primly.

"Don't thank me," he said. "Remember, a year of your life for each one. The other thirty-eight volumes are here on this shelf."

It was one thing to have that odd man find all these books for her, but what would the clerk ask for them? She looked about, hoping to see some way of solving her problem.

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Just beyond the head of the stairs was a table of books about the same size as the volumes of Bancroft. Trashy modern things, not worthy of her notice, but the dust jackets on them . . .

Using the Kleenex, she took off the dust jackets and put them on the Bancroft books. There was no sense in paying any more than she had to.

Only 75 cents for each of those big books! Clean enough to handle, too, if she hadn't had to contaminate them with those filthy, ragged dust jackets.

It was dark by the time she got home. She could hardly wait to turn on the light and wash her hands properly with disinfectant and soap before she called Amory and told him to come over there right away. She wouldn't tell him why she wanted him. Let him wait until he got there. Let him get the full impact of those thirty-nine books without warning.

Christine hadn't intended to let him know what books she had until she'd acquired a great many more, but getting all of Bancroft's *Works* at once, even if they did count as only one item, was something she couldn't wait to gloat about. And in such good condition, too. She hoped Amory wouldn't think of asking what other books she had.

She put down the telephone and leaned back, idly drumming her fingers on the chair arms. How still the house was! Her mother and father and Amory must have gone out. It wasn't fair of them to go like that without telling her, leaving her all alone.

There was something wrong with the room. Everything was out of focus. It must be those bright new electric lights, though you would think she would be accustomed to them by this time. They had had them for over a year now. She put up her hands to shade her eyes. How could she have put on spectacles without knowing it? Her mother's? No — she didn't think so. Uneasiness chilled her as she took them off.

The room came into focus now, but there was still something wrong. The walls seemed lighter, a different color. And the bead portieres at the dining room door — where were they? She had made the beads herself out of bright magazine covers, rolling and shellacking them. Amory didn't like them. Had he taken them away without telling her?

The doorbell shrilled and she ran to answer it.

"Why, Father!" she exclaimed in relief. She looked beyond him. "Where's Mother?"

Why did he stare at her like that? Had something dreadful happened to Mother? To Amory?

"Where is Miss Lannard?" he asked.

Was he joking?

"My sister asked me to come here this evening," he said. "Where is she?"

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She stood there, staring at him. Father had no sister.

He pushed past her into the house. "Christine!" he called.

An iciness touched the back of Christine's neck, spread to her shoulders. What was the matter with Father? Why did he act like that? As if he didn't know her. As if he didn't live there. She could hear him searching the house.

He came back into the living room and picked up the telephone.

Telephone? When had the telephone been put in? What was happening to Father, to her, to the house? Her heart beat sickeningly.

The police came.

"I'm Amory Lannard," her father said.

Amory Lannard? Her father's name was Christopher. . . .

"I came here and found this young woman alone in my sister's house. She refuses to tell me what has happened."

All of them hammered her with questions. Who was she? What was she doing in Miss Lannard's house? What had she done with Miss Lannard?

Why did they keep asking her such questions when they wouldn't believe her answers? Their insistent voices beat against her until only an occasional word or phrase broke through her bewilderment.

. . . *looks vaguely familiar* . . . That was Amory-Father's voice.

. . . *observation* . . .

. . . *psych ward* . . . What did that mean?

. . . FIND THE BODY . . .

. . . *this young woman* . . . She giggled. That was the one nice part of it all — to be called "young" when you were all of 31.

Coming Next Month

In addition to the final installment of Robert A. Heinlein's STAR LUMMOX, the July issue of F&SF (out early in June) will contain:

Shadow of Wings, a fine short novelet by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding in which she explores, in warmly human terms, the effect on our nature-ignoring civilization of an abrupt change in ecological balance;

short stories by Robert Sheckley, Jack Finney, Randall Garrett and others;

and two very different kinds of F&SF specialties: a first story by a new writer, Albert Compton Friborg, and a fascinating historical discovery — an 1894 story which extraordinarily anticipates the very modern problem of smog.

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Star Lummox

by ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

(Second of Three Parts)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KIRBERGER

SYNOPSIS: *When the* Trail Blazer *returned, 100 years ago, from the history-making first interstellar voyage beyond the Einstein barrier of the speed of light, one of the crew, John Thomas Stuart VIII, smuggled home a pet, a cute little eight-legged alien from a planet the ship touched so briefly that its spatial coordinates were never calculated. By now the star beast* LUMMOX *has outlived three generations of Stuarts and outgrown an endless succession of pet-houses. With a hide tougher than armor plate, the general build of a triceratops, and a metabolism which enables him to digest literally anything as food, Lummox seems all but indestructible; and an innocent playfulness and curiosity, surprising in such a titan, together with his squeaky voice and limited speech (like a four-year-old girl), make him singularly lovable. To young* JOHN THOMAS STUART XI, *Lummox is at once a well-loved pet, who has never disobeyed a specific order from his master, and almost a brother; to his widowed mother,* MRS. STUART, *the beast is a nuisance and a dangerous rival for her son's affections.*

The Stuart tranquility is disrupted suddenly when Lummox is naughty enough to wander off on his own, casually destroying and devouring the neighbors' property and rousing panic in the little town of Westville. Crude police efforts at restraint only succeed in panicking him. John Thomas manages to quiet him down and bring him safely home; but by now the townsfolk are aroused and demand the destruction of this (they assert) monstrous danger.

Because Lummox is an extra-terrestrial, and the only specimen of his kind ever seen on earth, this local furor becomes the concern of HENRY KIKU, *the shrewd, courteous and tough-minded Permanent Under Secretary of the Department of Spatial Affairs. Mr. Kiku dispatches his top agent and probable successor,* SERGEI GREENBERG, *to Westville to sit in judgment upon*

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Lummox. In a trial of great legal complexity — enlivened and complicated by the efforts of John Thomas' high-spirited and precocious girl friend, BETTY SORENSON, *to act as counsel for the defense — Greenberg attempts to reach a Solomonic verdict which will appease the local citizens and still preserve the life of Lummox; but Lummox ruins everything when he hears his beloved master being abused by opposing counsel. He eats his way out of the special steel cage erected for him, crashes through the wall of the courtroom — and Greenberg sees no alternative to ordering his destruction.*

Back in Capital Enclave, Mr. Kiku reluctantly approves the decision, but tests Greenberg by briefly leaving him in charge as Acting Under Secretary. Greenberg meets the test with an inspired afterthought, amending the order to postpone destruction until after a thorough examination by leading xenologists, scientists specializing in alien life — a research project that will take the rest of Lummox' life, however long it may be.

Meanwhile Mr. Kiku and DepSpace are faced with a new problem. The spaceship of a race never before heard of, the HROSHII, *has settled into a menacing orbit around Earth and issued an ultimatum for the return of a kidnaped scion of the race. Any hope that this missing extra-terrestrial might be Lummox is promptly dashed; the Hroshii are also eight-legged, but they have hands — Lummox has no manipulative organs at all, and cannot belong to an intelligent race.*

To make matters worse, Mr. Kiku has a deep-seated snake-phobia, and the Hroshii are represented by the Rargyllian envoy DR. FTAEML. *The Rargyllians are the ablest translators and go-betweens (and the liveliest gossips) in Space; they are also medusoids, with such a crop of head tendrils that Mr. Kiku has to undergo hypnotic therapy before he and Greenberg can join Dr. Ftaeml for a crucial conference.*

And in Westville, POLICE CHIEF DREISER *is busy devising ways to kill Lummox, with or without DepSpace approval.*

VI

"DR. FTAEML, this is my associate, Mr. Greenberg."

The Rargyllian bowed low, his double knees and unhuman articulation making it an impressive rite. "I know the distinguished Mr. Greenberg by reputation, through a compatriot who was privileged to work with him. I am honored, sir."

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Greenberg answered with the same sort of polite amphigory the cosmic linguist had selected. "I have long wished for the boon of experiencing in person the scholarly aura of Dr. Ftaeml, but I had never dared let the wish blossom into hope. Your servant and pupil, sir."

"Hrrump!" Mr. Kiku interrupted. "Doctor, this delicate affair you are negotiating is of such importance that I, with my constant housekeeping chores, have not been able to give it the close attention it demands. Mr. Greenberg is ambassador extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of the Federation, commanded for this purpose."

Greenberg's eyes flicked toward his boss. He had noticed that the boss had earlier said "associate" rather than "assistant" and had spotted it as the elementary maneuver of enhancing the prestige of one's own negotiators for advantage in protocol — but he had not expected this sudden brevet. He decided that the boss must have a hunch that this silly business had importance not evident. Or was he simply getting the medusoid off his back?

Dr. Ftaeml bowed again. "Most gratifying to work with His Excellency." Greenberg suspected that the Rargyllian was not fooled; nevertheless it probably was really gratifying to him, since it implied that the medusoid was himself of ambassadorial rank.

A female aide brought in refreshments; they stopped for ritual. Ftaeml selected a French wine, while Greenberg and Kiku chose, by Hobson's choice, the only Rargyllian item available — some stuff called "wine" through failure of language but which looked like bread mushed into milk and tasted as if sulphuric acid had been added. Greenberg went through the motions of enjoying it while not letting it pass his lips.

He noticed with respect that the boss actually consumed the stuff.

The rite common to seven out of ten civilizations gave Greenberg time to size up Ftaeml. The medusoid was dressed in an expensive parody of terrestrial formal clothes — cutaway jacket, lacy jabot, and striped shorts. He helped to hide the fact that, while he was a bifurcate humanoid with two legs, two arms, and head at the top of an elongated trunk, he was not remotely human in any but the legal sense.

But Greenberg had grown up in the presence of the Great Martians and had dealt with many other peoples since; he did not expect "men" to look like men. Ftaeml was, to his eye, handsome and certainly graceful. His dry, chitinous skin, purple with green highlights, was as neat as a leopard's pelt and as decorative. The absence of a nose was no matter and was made up for by the mobile, sensitive mouth.

Greenberg decided that Ftaeml must have his tail wrapped around him under his clothes — Rargyllians would go to any trouble to conform to the

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ancient, urbane rule that when in Rome, one should shoot Roman candles. The other Rargyllian Greenberg had worked with had worn no clothes at all (since the people of Vega-VI wore none) and had carried his tail aloft, like a proud cat.

He glanced at the medusoid's tendrils. Pshaw! they weren't snakelike. The boss must have a neurosis as big as a house. Sure, they were about a foot long and as thick as his thumb, but they didn't have eyes, they didn't have mouths or teeth — they were just tendrils. Most races had tendrils of some sort. What were fingers but short tendrils?

Mr. Kiku put down his cup when Dr. Ftaeml set down his glass. "Doctor, you have consulted with your principals?"

"Sir, I have had that honor. And may I take this opportunity to thank you for the scout ship you so graciously placed at my disposal for the unavoidable trips back and forth from the surface of your lovely planet to the vessel of the people I have the privilege of assisting? It is, I may say without casting any reflections on the great people I now serve, more suited to the purpose and more comfortable to one of my build than are the auxiliary craft of their vessel."

"Not at all. Glad to do a favor to a friend."

"You are gracious, Mr. Under Secretary."

"Well, what did they say?"

Dr. Ftaeml shrugged his whole body. "It pains me to inform you that they are unmoved. They insist that their she-child be returned to them without delay."

Mr. Kiku frowned. "No doubt you explained that we don't have their missing child, have never heard of it, have no reason to think that she has ever been on this planet and strong reason to believe that she never could have been?"

"I did. You will pardon my inurbanity if I translate their answer in terms crude but unmistakable." He shrugged apologetically. "They say you are lying."

Mr. Kiku took no offense, being aware that a Rargyllian go-between was as impersonal as a telephone. "It would be better if I *were* lying. Then I could hand over their brat and the matter would be finished."

"*I* believe you," Dr. Ftaeml said suddenly.

"Thank you. Why?"

"You used the subjunctive."

"Oh. Did you tell them that there were over 7,000 varieties of non-terrestrial creatures on Earth, represented by some hundreds of thousands of individuals? That of these individuals some 30,000 are sentient beings? But of these sentient beings only a very few have anything like the physical

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characteristics of your Hroshii? And that all those few we can account for as to race and planet of origin?"

"I am Rargyllian, sir. I told them all that and more, in their own language, putting it more clearly than you could explain it to another Earthman. I made it live."

"I believe you." Mr. Kiku tapped the table top. "Do you have a suggestion?"

"Just a moment," put in Greenberg. "Don't you have a picture of a typical Horoshii? It might help."

" 'Horoshiu,' " corrected Ftaeml. "Or, in this case, 'Hroshia.' I am sorry. They do not use symbology of the picture type. Unfortunately I am not equipped to take one of your pictures."

"An eyeless race?"

"No, Excellency. Their sight is quite good, quite subtle. But their eyes and nervous systems abstract somewhat differently from yours. Their analog of 'picture' would be meaningless to you. Even I find it difficult and my race is admitted to be the most subtle of all in the interpretation of symbolic abstraction."

"Well . . . describe one to us. Use your justly famed semantic talents."

"A pleasure. The Hroshii manning this vessel are all about of a size, being of the military class —"

Mr. Kiku interrupted. "Military class? Doctor, is this a war vessel? You did not tell me this."

Dr. Ftaeml looked pained. "I considered the fact both obvious and distasteful."

"I suppose so." Mr. Kiku wondered if he should alert the Federation General Staff. Not now, he decided. Mr. Kiku was strongly prejudiced against the introduction of military might into negotiations, since he believed that a show of force not only was an admission of failure on the part of diplomats but also poisoned the chances of accomplishing anything more by negotiation. He could rationalize this opinion but he held it as an emotion. "Go on, please."

"The military class are of three sexes; the differences in the types are not readily apparent and need not concern us. My shipmates and hosts are perhaps six inches higher than this table and half again your height in length. Each has four pairs of legs and two arms. Their hands are small and supple and extremely dexterous. They are remarkably adroit with machines, instruments, and delicate manipulations of every sort."

Greenberg relaxed a little as Ftaeml talked. Despite everything, the vagrant notion had still been bothering him that this creature "Lummox" might be of the Hroshii — but he saw now that the thought came from

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nothing more than accidental similarity in leg number — as if an ostrich were a man because of two legs!

Dr. Ftaeml was continuing: "— but the outstanding characteristic of the Hroshii, not covered by these mere facts of size, shape, body structure, and mechanical function, is an overwhelming impression of great mental power. So overwhelming, in fact —" the medusoid chuckled in embarrassment "— that I was almost persuaded to waive my professional fee and serve them as a privilege."

Greenberg was impressed. These Hroshii really must have something; the Rargyllians, honest brokers though they were, would let a man die of thirst rather than tell him the local word for water, unless cash was in hand. Their mercenary attitude had the quality of devoutness.

"The only thing," Ftaeml added, "that saved me from this excess was the knowledge that in one thing I excelled them. They are not linguists. Rich and powerful as their own speech is, it is the only language they ever learn well. They are even less talented linguistically than is your own race." Ftaeml spread his grotesque hands in a gesture that seemed purely Gallic and added, "So I repaired my self-esteem and charged twice my usual fee."

He ceased talking. Mr. Kiku stared glumly at the table and Greenberg merely waited. Finally Kiku said, "What do you suggest?"

"My esteemed friend, there is only one course that is of any use. The Hroshia they seek must be delivered up."

"But we do not have this Hroshia."

Ftaeml simulated a human sigh. "That is regrettable."

Greenberg looked at him sharply; the sigh did not carry conviction. "Dr. Ftaeml, when you undertook this commission for the Hroshii, did you expect that we would be able to produce this, uh, Hroshia?"

The creature's tendrils suddenly slumped; Greenberg cocked an eyebrow and said drily, "No, I see that you did not. May I ask why, then, you accepted this commission?"

Ftaeml answered slowly and without his usual confidence: "Sir, one does not refuse a commission of the Hroshii. Believe me, one does not."

"Hmm . . . these Hroshii. Doctor, will you pardon me if I say that you have not yet conveyed to me a full understanding of these people? You tell us that they are mentally very powerful, so much so that a leading mind of a highly advanced race — yourself — is almost 'overwhelmed' by them. You imply that they are powerful in other ways — that you, a member of a proud, free race, must obey their wishes. Now here they are in a single ship, facing an entire planet, a planet so powerful that it has been able to create hegemony more extensive than any before in this portion of space — yet you say that it would be 'regrettable' if we were not to satisfy them."

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"All that is true," Ftaeml answered carefully.

"When a Rargyllian speaks professionally I cannot disbelieve him. Yet this I have trouble believing. These superbeings . . . why have we never heard of them?"

"Space is deep, Excellency."

"Yes, yes. No doubt there are thousands of great races that we of Earth have never met, will never meet. Am I to infer that this is also the first contact of your race with the Hroshii?"

"No. We have long known of them — longer than we have known of you."

"Eh?" Greenberg glanced sharply at Mr. Kiku. He went on, "What are the relations of Rargyll with the Hroshii? And why has not this been reported to the Federation?"

"Excellency, is that last question a rebuke? If so, I must answer that I am not acting for my government."

"No," Greenberg assured him, "it was a simple inquiry. The Federation always seeks to extend its diplomatic linkage as far as possible. I was surprised to learn that your race, which claims friendship with ours, could know of a mighty civilization and not make that fact known to the Federation."

"May I say, Excellency, that I am surprised at your surprise? Space is deep — and my race have long been great travelers. Perhaps the Federation has not asked the right questions? As for the other, my people have no diplomatic relations, no relations of any sort, with the mighty Hroshii. They are a people who, as you say, mind their own business, and we are very happy to (as you would phrase it) — to stay out of their yard. It has been years, more than five of your centuries, since the last time a Hroshij ship appeared in our skies and demanded service from us. It is better so."

Greenberg said, "I seem to be getting more confused the more I know. They stopped at Rargyll to pick up an interpreter instead of coming straight here?"

"Not precisely. They appeared in our skies and asked if we had ever heard of you people? We answered that we knew you — for when the Hroshii ask, they are answered! We identified your star and I had the unsought honor to be chosen to represent them." He shrugged. "Here I am. Let me add that it was not until we were deep in space that I learned the object of their search."

Greenberg had made note earlier of a loose end. "Just a moment. They retained you, they started for Earth, then told you that they were searching for a missing Hroshia. It must have been then that you decided that this mission would fail. Why?"

"Is it not evident? We Rargyllians, in your lovely and precise idiom,

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are the greatest gossips in space. Perhaps you would say 'historians' but I mean something more lively than that. Gossips. We go everywhere, we know everyone, we speak all languages. I did not need to 'check the files' to know that men of Earth had never been to the capital planet of the Hroshii. Had you made such contact you would have forced your attentions on them and started a war. It would have been a 'scandal to the jaybirds' — a lovely phrase, that; I must see a jaybird while I am here. It would have been discussed with many a fine anecdote wherever two Rargyllians got together. So I knew that they must be mistaken; they would not find what they sought."

"In other words," Greenberg answered, "you people identified the wrong planet — and wished this problem on us."

"Please," protested Dr. Ftaeml. "Our identification was perfect, I assure you — not of your planet, for the Hroshii did not know where you came from — but of you yourself. The creatures they wished to locate were men of Earth, in every possible detail . . . down to your finger nails, your internal organs."

"Yet you knew they were mistaken. Doctor, I am not the semantician you are. I seem to see a paradox."

"Permit me to explain. We who deal professionally in words know how cheap words are. A paradox can exist only in words, never in the facts behind the words. Since the Hroshii described exactly the men of Earth and since I knew that the men of Earth knew not the Hroshii, I concluded what I must conclude — that there is another race in this galaxy as like to your race as twin Sornia in their shell — as two peas in the pod."

"I find that notion statistically unlikely to the point of impossibility."

"The entire universe, Mr. Under Secretary, is wildly unlikely to the point of ridiculousness. Therefore, we of Rargyll know that God is a humorist."

"You explained this conclusion of yours to your clients?"

"I did — and I repeated it most carefully in my latest consultation. The result was foreseeable."

"Yes?"

"Each race has its talent, each its weakness. The Hroshii, once having with mighty intellect arrived at an opinion, are not easily swayed. 'Pig-headed' is your precise term."

"Pig-headedness breeds pig-headedness, Dr. Ftaeml."

"Please, my dear sir! I hope that you will not be so tempted. Let me report, if I must, that you have been unable to find their treasured one, but that you are instituting new and more thorough searches. I am your friend — do not admit that this negotiation has failed."

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"I never broke off a negotiation in my life," Mr. Kiku answered sourly. "If you can't outargue the other fellow, sometimes you can outlive him. But I do not see what more we have to offer them. Except for that one possibility we spoke of last time — did you bring the coordinates of their planet? Or did they refuse?"

"I have them. I told you that they would not refuse; the Hroshii are not in the least afraid of having other races know where to find them — they are merely indifferent." Dr. Ftaeml opened a brief case which was either an imitation of a terrestrial one, or might have been purchased on Earth. "Nevertheless it was not easy. The where-and-when had to be translated from their concepts to those using Rargyll as the true center of the universe, for which purpose it required that I first convince them of the necessity, then explain to them space-time units as used on Rargyll. Now, since I must shame myself by admitting that I am not skilled in your methods of reckoning the shape of the universe, it is necessary that I have help in translating our figures into yours."

"No need to feel shame-faced," Mr. Kiku answered. "I don't know anything about our astrogation methods myself. We use specialists for that sort of thing. Just a moment." He touched an ornamental knob on the conference table. "Get me BuAstro."

"They've all gone home for the day," a disembodied female voice answered, "except the astrogation duty officer."

"Then that's who I want. Hurry it up."

Very shortly a male voice said, "Dr. Warner, night-duty officer."

"Kiku here. Doctor, you solve space-time correlations?"

"Of course, sir."

"Can you do it from Rargyllian data?"

"Rargyllian?" The duty officer whistled softly. "That's a tough one, sir. Dr. Singh is the man for that."

"Get him up here, right away."

"Uh, why, he's gone home, sir. He'll be here in the morning."

"I didn't ask where he was; I said, 'Get him up here — right away.' Use police alarm and general call, if necessary. I want him *now*."

"Er . . . yes, sir."

Mr. Kiku turned back to Dr. Ftaeml. "I expect to be able to show that no terrestrial starship ever visited the Hroshii. Fortunately we do have astrogation records for every interstellar trip. My thought is this: It is time that the principals met face to face in this negotiation. With your skillful interpretation we can show them that we have nothing to hide. Then, if they have anything to suggest, we will —" Mr. Kiku broke off as a door opened. He said tonelessly, "How do you do, Mr. Secretary?"

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The Most Honorable Mr. Roy MacClure, Secretary for Spatial Affairs for the Federated Community of Civilizations, was entering. His eye seemed to light only on Mr. Kiku. "There you are, Henry! Been looking all over. That stupid girl didn't know where you had gone, but I found that you had not left the building. You must —"

Mr. Kiku took him firmly by the elbow and said loudly, "Mr. Secretary, allow me to present Dr. Ftaeml, Ambassador *de facto* of the mighty Hroshii."

Mr. MacClure met the occasion. "How do you do, Doctor? Or should I say 'Excellency'?" He had the grace not to stare.

" 'Doctor' will do nicely, Mr. Secretary. I am well, thank you. May I enquire as to your health?"

"Oh, good enough, good enough — if everything didn't pop at once. Which reminds me . . . can you spare me my chief assistant? I'm awfully sorry but something urgent has come up."

"Certainly, Mr. Secretary. Your pleasure is my greatest wish."

Mr. MacClure looked sharply at the medusoid but found himself unable to read his expression — if the thing had expressions, he amended. "Good. I really am sorry, but — Henry, if you please?"

Mr. Kiku bowed to the Rargyllian, then left the table while wearing an expression so masklike that Greenberg shivered. Kiku spoke in a whisper to MacClure as soon as they were away from the table.

MacClure glanced back at the other two, then answered in a whisper that Greenberg could catch. "Yes, yes! But Henry, what in the world possessed you to ground those ships without consulting me first?"

Mr. Kiku's reply was inaudible. MacClure went on, "Nonsense! Well, you will just have to come out and face them. You can't —"

Mr. Kiku turned back abruptly. "Dr. Ftaeml, was it your intention to return to the Hroshii ship tonight?"

"There is no hurry. I am at your service, sir."

"You are most gracious. May I leave you in Mr. Greenberg's care? We speak as one."

The Rargyllian bowed. "I shall count it an honor."

"I look forward to the pleasure of your company tomorrow."

Dr. Ftaeml bowed again. "Until tomorrow. Mr. Secretary, Mr. Under Secretary . . . your servant."

The two left. Greenberg did not know whether to laugh or cry; he felt embarrassed for his whole race. The medusoid was watching him silently.

Greenberg grinned with half his mouth and said, "Doctor, does the Rargyllian tongue include swear words?"

"Sir, I can use profanity in more than a thousand tongues . . . some

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having curses that will addle an egg at a thousand paces. May I teach you some of them?"

Greenberg sat back and laughed heartily. "Doctor, I like you. I really like you . . . quite aside from our mutual professional duty to be civil."

Ftaeml shaped his lips in a good imitation of a human smile. "Thank you, sir. The feeling is mutual — and gratifying. May I say without offense that the reception given my sort on your great planet is sometimes something that one must be philosophical about?"

"I know. I'm sorry. My own people, most of them, are honestly convinced that the prejudices of their native village were ordained by the Almighty."

"You need not be ashamed. Believe me, sir, that is the one conviction which is shared by all races everywhere . . . the only thing we all have in common. I do not except my own race. If you knew languages — The idioms of every language say over and over again, 'He is a stranger and therefore a barbarian.' "

Greenberg grinned wryly. "Discouraging, isn't it?"

"Discouraging? Why, sir? It is sidesplitting. It is the only joke that God ever repeats, because its humor never grows stale." The medusoid added, "What is your wish, sir? Are we to continue to explore this matter? Or is your purpose merely to stretch the palaver until the return of your . . . associate?"

Greenberg knew that the Rargyllian was saying as politely as possible that Greenberg could not act without Kiku. Greenberg decided that there was no sense in pretending otherwise — and besides, he was hungry. "Haven't we worked enough today, Doctor? Would you do me the honor of having dinner with me?"

"I should be delighted! But . . . you know our peculiarities of diet?"

"Certainly. Remember, I spent some weeks with one of your compatriots. We can go to the Hotel Universal."

"Yes, of course." Dr. Ftaeml seemed unenthusiastic.

"Unless there is something you would like better?"

"I have heard of your restaurants with entertainment — would it be possible? Or is it . . . ?"

"A night club?" Greenberg thought. "Yes! The Club Cosmic. Their kitchen can do anything the Universal can."

They were about to leave when a door dilated and a slender, swarthy man stuck his head in. "Oh. Excuse me. I thought Mr. Kiku was here."

Greenberg remembered suddenly that the boss had summoned a relativity mathematician. "Just a moment. You must be Dr. Singh."

"Yes."

"Sorry. Mr. Kiku had to leave, I am here for him."

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He introduced the two and explained the problem; Dr. Singh looked over the Rargyllian's scroll and nodded. "This will take a while."

"May I help you, Doctor?" asked Ftaeml.

"It won't be necessary. Your notes are quite complete." Thus assured, Greenberg and Ftaeml went out on the town.

The floor show at the Club Cosmic included a juggler, which delighted Ftaeml, and girls, which delighted Greenberg. It was late by the time Greenberg left Ftaeml in one of the special suites reserved for non-human guests of DepSpace at Hotel Universal. Greenberg was yawning as he came down the lift, but decided that the evening had been worth while in the interest of good foreign relations.

Tired though he was, he stopped by the department. Dr. Ftaeml had spilled one item during the evening that he thought the boss should know — tonight if he could reach him, or leave it on his desk if not. The Rargyllian, in an excess of pleasure over the juggler, had expressed regret that such things must so soon cease to be.

"What do you mean?" Greenberg had asked.

"When mighty Earth is volatilized —" the medusoid had begun, then stopped.

Greenberg had pressed him about it. But the Rargyllian insisted that he had been joking.

Greenberg doubted if it meant anything. But Rargyllian humor was usually much more subtle; he decided to tell the bosss about it as quickly as possible. Maybe that strange ship needed a shot of paralysis frequencies, a "nutcracker" bomb, and a dose of vacuum.

He found Mr. Kiku bent over his desk; the incoming basket was clogged as always but the Under Secretary was paying it no attention. He glanced up and said quietly, "Good evening, Sergei. Look at this."

It was Dr. Singh's rework of Dr. Ftaeml's notes. Greenberg picked out at the bottom the geocentric coordinates and did a quick sum. "Over nine hundred light-years!" he commented. "And out in *that* direction, too. No wonder we've never encountered them. Not exactly next-door neighbors, eh?"

"Never mind that," Mr. Kiku admonished. "Note the date. This computation is the Hroshii's claim as to when and where they were visited by one of our ships."

Greenberg looked and felt his eyebrows crawl up toward his scalp. He turned to the answer machine and started to code an inquiry. "Don't bother," Kiku told him. "Your recollection is correct. The *Trail Blazer*. Second trip."

"The *Trail Blazer*," Greenberg repeated foolishly.

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"Yes, We never knew where she went, so we couldn't have guessed. But we know exactly *when* she went. It matches. Much simpler hypothesis than Dr. Ftaeml's twin races."

"Of course." He looked at his boss. "Then it is . . . Lummox."

"Yes, it's Lummox."

"But it *can't* be Lummox. No hands. Stupid as a rabbit."

"No, it can't be. But it is."

VII

Lummox was not in the reservoir. He had got tired and had gone home. It had been necessary to tear a notch in the reservoir to get out comfortably, but he had damaged it no more than was needful. He did not care to have any arguments with John Thomas over such silly matters — not any more arguments, that is.

Several people made a fuss over his leaving, but he ignored them. He was careful not to step on anybody and their actions he treated with dignified reserve. Even when they turned those hated spray things on him he did not let them herd him thereby, the way they had herded him out of that big building the day he had gone for a walk; he simply closed his eyes and his rows of nostrils, put his head down and slogged for home.

John Thomas met him on the way, having been fetched by the somewhat hysterical chief of safety. Lummox stopped and made a saddle for John Thomas, after mutual greetings and reassurances, then resumed his steady march homeward.

Chief Dreiser was almost incoherent. "Turn that brute around and head him back!" he screamed.

"You do it," Johnnie advised grimly.

"I'll have your hide for this! I'll . . . I'll . . ."

"What have *I* done?"

"You — It's what you haven't done. That beast broke out and —"

"I wasn't even there," John Thomas pointed out while Lummox continued plodding.

"Yes, but — That's got nothing to do with it! He's out now; it's up to you to assist the law and get him penned up again."

"I don't see how you figure. You took him away from me. You got him condemned and you say he doesn't belong to me any longer. You tried to kill him — you know you did, without waiting to see if the government would okay it. If he belongs to me, I ought to sue you. If he doesn't belong to me, it's no skin off my nose if Lummox climbs out of that silly tank." John Thomas leaned over and looked down. "Why don't you climb into

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your car, Chief, instead of running along beside us and getting yourself winded?"

Chief Dreiser ungraciously accepted the advice and let his driver pick him up. By the time this was done he had somewhat recovered his balance. He leaned out and said, "John Stuart, I won't bandy words with you. Citizens are required to assist peace officers when necessary. I am demanding officially — and I've got this car's recorder going while I ask it — that you assist me in returning that beast to the reservoir."

John Thomas looked innocent. "Then can I go home?"

"Huh? Of course."

"Thanks, Chief. Uh, how long do you figure he will stay in the reservoir after I put him in it and go home? Or were you planning on hiring me in as a permanent member of your police force?"

Lummox went home.

Nevertheless Dreiser regarded it as only a temporary setback; the stubborness that made him a good police officer did not desert him. He admitted to himself that the public was probably safer with the beast penned up at home while he figured out a surefire way to kill him. The order from the Under Secretary for Spatial affairs, permitting him to destroy Lummox, arrived and that made Dreiser feel better — old Judge O'Farrell had been pretty sarcastic about his jumping the gun.

The cancellation of that order and the amended order postponing Lummox's death indefinitely never reached him. A new clerk in the communications office of DepSpace made a slight error, simply a transposition of two symbols; the cancellation went to Pluto — and the amended order, being keyed to the cancellation, followed it.

So Dreiser sat in his office with the death order clutched in his hand and thought about ways to kill the beast.

Lummox seemed contented to be home, ready to let bygones be bygones. He never said a word about Chief Dreiser and, if he realized that anyone had tried to harm him, he did not mention it. His naturally sunny disposition displayed itself by wanting to put his head in Johnnie's lap for cuddling. It had been a long time since his head was small enough for this; he merely placed the end of his muzzle on the boy's thighs, carrying the weight himself, while Johnnie stroked his nose with a brickbat.

Johnnie was happy only on one side. With the return of Lummox he felt much better, but he knew that nothing had been settled; presently Chief Dreiser would again try to kill Lummox. What to do about it was an endless ache in his middle.

His mother had added to his unhappiness by raising a loud squawk when

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she saw "that beast!" returned to the Stuart home. John Thomas had ignored her demands, threats, and orders and had gone ahead stabling his friend and feeding and watering him; after a while she had stormed back into the house, saying that she was going to phone Chief Dreiser. Johnnie had expected that and was fairly sure that nothing would come of it — and nothing did; his mother remained in the house. But Johnnie brooded about it; he had a life-long habit of getting along with his mother, deferring to her, obeying her. Bucking her was even more distressing to him than it was to her.

He did not go in to dinner. Presently his mother came out with a tray. "I thought you might like to picnic out here with Lummox," she said blandly.

Johnnie looked at her sharply. "Why, thanks, Mum . . . uh, thanks."

"How is Lummie?"

"Uh, he's all right, I guess."

"That's good."

He stared after her as she went in. Mum angry was bad enough, but Mum all sweetness and light, he was even more wary of. Nevertheless he polished off the excellent dinner, not having eaten since breakfast. She came out again a half hour later and said, "Finished, dear?"

"Uh, yes — thanks, it was good."

"Thank you, dear. Will you bring the tray in? And come in yourself; there is a Mr. Perkins coming to see you at 8."

"Mr. Perkins? Who's he?" But the door was closing behind her.

He found his mother downstairs, resting and knitting socks. She smiled and said, "Well? How are we now?"

"All right. Say, Mum, who is this Perkins? Why does he want to see *me?*"

"He phoned this afternoon for an appointment. I told him to come at 8."

"Is it about Lummox?"

"Don't cross-examine me. You'll know quickly enough."

"But, look here, I —"

"We'll say no more about it, do you mind?" She rolled up her knitting and put it aside. "Go wash your hands — yes, and your face, too — and comb your hair. Mr. Perkins will be here any moment."

Mr. Perkins turned out to be pleasant; John Thomas liked him despite his suspicions. After a few polite inanities, with coffee served for ritual hospitality, he came to the point.

He represented the Exotic Life Laboratory of the Museum of Natural

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History. As a result of the news picture of Lummox in connection with the story of the trial the beast had come to the attention of the Museum — which now wanted to buy him.

"To my surprise," he added, "in searching the files I discovered that on another occasion the Museum attempted to buy this specimen . . . from your grandfather, I believe. The name was the same as yours and the date fitted. Are you any relation to —"

"My great-great-great-grandfather — sure," John Thomas interrupted. "And it was probably my grandfather they tried to buy Lummox from. But he was not for sale then — and he's not for sale now!"

His mother looked up from knitting and said, "Be reasonable, dear. You are in no position to take that attitude."

John Thomas looked stubborn. Mr. Perkins went on with a warm smile, "I sympathize with your feelings, Mr. Stuart. But our legal department looked into the matter before I came out here and I am familiar with your present problems. Believe me, I'm not here to make them worse; we have a solution that will protect your pet and clear up your troubles."

"I'm not going to sell Lummox," John Thomas persisted.

"Why not? If it turns out to be the only solution?"

"Well . . . because I can't. He wasn't left to me to sell, he was left to me to keep and take care of. He was in this family before I was — before my mother was, for that matter." He looked sternly at his mother. "Mum, I don't know what's gotten into you."

She answered quietly, "That will be enough of that, dear. Mother does what is best for you."

Mr. Perkins changed the subject smoothly as John Thomas began to cloud up. "In any case, now that I've come all this way, may I see the creature? I'm terribly interested."

"Uh, I suppose so." Johnnie got up slowly and led the stranger outside.

Mr. Perkins looked up at Lummox, took a deep breath and let it out. "Marvellous!" He walked around him, admiring. "Absolutely marvellous! Unique . . . and the biggest e.-t. specimen I've ever seen. How in the world was he shipped?"

"Why, he's grown some," John Thomas admitted.

"I understand he parrots human speech a bit. Can you coax him to do it?"

"Huh? He doesn't 'parrot' — he *talks*."

"Really?"

"Of course. Hey, Lummie, how are you, boy?"

"I'm all right," Lummox piped. "What does *he* want?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. He just wanted to see you."

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Mr. Perkins stared. "He talks! Mr. Stuart, the laboratory *must* have this specimen."

"That's out, I told you."

"I'm prepared to go much higher, now that I've seen him . . . and heard him."

John Thomas started to say something rude, checked himself and said instead, "Look, Mr. Perkins, are you married?"

"Why, yes. Why?"

"Any kids?"

"One, a little girl. She's just five."

"I'll make you a deal. We'll swap even. No questions asked and each of us does as he likes with his 'specimen.' "

Perkins started to flare up, then suddenly grinned. "Touché! I'll shut up. But," he went on, "you were taking a chance. One or two of my colleagues would have taken you up. You can't understand what a temptation a specimen like this is to a man of science."

Mrs. Stuart looked up as they came in; Mr. Perkins shook his head briefly. They sat down and Mr. Perkins fitted his finger tips together. "Mr. Stuart, you have forbidden me to discuss a possible sale, but if I tell the director of the Lab that I didn't even put the proposition, I will look foolish. Would you let me state what the Museum has in mind . . . just for the record?"

"Well —" John Thomas frowned. "I guess there's no harm in that."

"Thanks. I must do something to justify my travel expenses. Now, that creature — your friend Lummox — or let's say 'our friend Lummox,' for I liked him as soon as I saw him. Our friend Lummox is under sentence of death, isn't he?"

"Yes," John Thomas admitted. "But it hasn't been confirmed by the Space Department yet."

"But any time now, tomorrow, or even today, the Department of Spatial Affairs will approve the destruction of Lummox and —"

"Maybe they'll turn it down."

"Can you risk Lummox's life on that unjustified hope? The Chief of Police will show up again . . . and this time he'll kill Lummox."

"No, he won't! He doesn't know how. We'll laugh at him!"

Mr. Perkins shook his head slowly. "That's not your head talking, that's your heart. The Chief will make sure this time. He's been made to look silly; he won't let it happen again. If he can't figure out a sure way himself, he'll get expert advice. Mr. Stuart, any biologist could run a rough analysis on Lummox and tell almost offhand two or three certain ways to kill him — kill him quickly and safely. I've already thought of one, just from seeing him."

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John Thomas looked at him in alarm. "You won't tell Chief Dreiser?"

"Of course not! I'd be strung up by the thumbs first. But there are thousands of others who can advise him. Or he may hit on a method himself. Be sure of this: if you wait until that death sentence is approved, it will be too late. They'll kill Lummox. And that would be a great pity."

John Thomas did not answer. Mr. Perkins added quietly, "You can't oppose the forces of society single-handed. If you are stubborn, you yourself will make certain that Lummox will be killed."

John Thomas pushed his fist hard against his mouth. Then he said almost inaudibly, "What can I *do*?"

"Much, if you let me help you. First, let me make this clear. If you entrust your pet to us, he will never be harmed in any way. You hear talk about vivisection and such — well, forget it. Our object is to put specimens into environments as much like their home planets as possible, then study them. We want them to be healthy and happy, and we go to a lot of trouble to accomplish those ends."

"Wait a minute. If you buy him, that doesn't get him off. They'll still kill him. Won't they?"

"Yes and no. Mostly no. Selling him to the Museum doesn't cancel the order to destroy him, but, believe me, it will never be carried out. I've been coached by our legal department as to what to do. First, we agree on terms and you give me a bill of sale; that gives the Museum legal standing. At once, tonight, I get hold of your local judge and get a temporary order postponing the execution for a few days; it is definitely within his discretion to postpone it while this new factor of a change in ownership is considered. That's all we need. We can get straight to the Secretary for Spatial affairs if we need to — and I promise you that, once the Museum holds title, Lummox will never be destroyed."

John Thomas traced out a pattern on the rug with his toe, then looked up. "Look, Mr. Perkins, I know I have to do something to save Lummox. But up to now I haven't seen any way — and I guess I haven't had the courage to look the facts in the face."

"Then you'll do it?"

"Just a minute, please! This isn't any good either. Lummie would be miserable with loneliness. He'd never get used to it. It would just be swapping death for life imprisonment. I'm not sure but what he'd rather be dead . . . than to be all alone, with a lot of strangers and them poking him and bothering him and making tests of him. But I can't even ask him what he wants because I'm not sure Lummie understands about death. But he does understand about strangers."

Mr. Perkins chewed his lip and reflected that it was very hard to do this

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young man a favor. "Mr. Stuart? If you were to go with Lummox, would it make a difference?"

"Huh? How?"

"I think I can promise you a job as an animal handler — in fact I have a vacancy in my own department; I could hire you tonight and we could sort the red tape later. After all, there is a real advantage in having an exotic animal cared for by someone who knows his ways."

Before Johnnie could answer, his mother said, "No!"

"Eh? What, Mrs. Stuart?"

"Out of the question. Mr. Perkins, I had hoped that you would provide a rational way out of this silly unpleasantness. But I cannot agree to that last suggestion. My son is to go to college. I will not have him waste his life sweeping out that beast's cage — like a roustabout! No indeed!"

"Now look here, mother —"

"John Thomas! If you please! The subject is closed."

Mr. Perkins looked from the boy's smoldering face to his mother's set expression. "After all," he said, "that is no business of the Museum. Let me put it this way, Mrs. Stuart. I'll keep that job open for, say six months — no, please, Mrs. Stuart! Whether or not your son takes it is your problem — and I'm sure you don't need my advice. I just want to assure your son that the Museum won't keep him away from his pet. Is that fair?"

"I suppose so," she admitted.

"Mr. Stuart?"

"Wait a minute. Mother, you don't think I'd —"

"Please, Mr. Stuart! The Museum of Natural History has no place in a family discussion. You know our offer. Will you accept?"

Mrs. Stuart interrupted. "I don't believe you mentioned the price."

"Why, so I didn't! Shall we say 20,000?"

"Net?"

"Net? Oh no — subject to the claims we'll have to settle, of course."

" 'Net,' Mr. Perkins," she said firmly.

He shrugged. "Net."

"We accept."

"Good."

"Hey, wait a minute!" protested John Thomas. "We don't either. Not if this other thing isn't settled. I'm not going to turn Lummox over to —"

"Dear, I've been patient but we'll have no more of this nonsense. Mr. Perkins, he accepts. Do you have the papers with you?"

"We don't either accept!"

"Just a moment," Mr. Perkins appealed. "Ma'am, am I correct in thinking that I must have your son's signature for a valid bill of sale?"

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"You'll get it."

"Hmm. Mr. Stuart?"

"I'm not going to sign unless it's settled that Lummox and I stay together."

"Mrs. Stuart?"

"This is ridiculous."

"I think so, too. But there is nothing I can do." Perkins stood up. "Good night, Mrs. Stuart. Thanks for your hospitality. Goodnight, Mr. Stuart. Thanks for letting me speak my piece — and for letting me see Lummox. No, don't get up; I can find the door."

He started to leave, while the Stuarts were busy not looking at each other. He paused at the door. "Mr. Stuart?"

"Huh? Yes, Mr. Perkins?"

"Would you do me a favor? Get as many pictures of Lummox as possible? Color-stereo-motion-sound if you can. I would have a professional crew flown here — but there may not be time. You know. It would be a shame indeed if there were not some scientific record left of him. So do what you can." He turned away again.

John Thomas gulped and was up out of his chair. "Mr. Perkins! Hey! Come back."

A few minutes later he found himself signing a bill of sale. His signature was shaky but legible. "Now Mrs. Stuart," Mr. Perkins said smoothly, "if you will sign underneath, where it says 'Guardian' — thanks! Oh yes! I must scratch out that part about 'subject to settlement of claims.' I don't have the cash with me; I got here after the banks had closed, so I'll pass over a nominal sum to bind it and we'll settle the rest before we move the specimen."

"No," said John Thomas.

"Eh?"

"I forgot to tell you. The Museum can settle the claims, since I can't, and after all Lummox did it. But I'm not going to take any money. I'd feel like Judas."

His mother said sharply, "John Thomas! I won't let you —"

"Better not say it, Mum," he said dangerously. "You know what Dad would have thought."

"Hrrrumph!" Mr. Perkins cleared his throat loudly. "I'm going to fill in the usual legal fiction of a nominal sum. I won't stay longer; Judge O'Farrell told me that he goes to bed at ten. Mrs. Stuart, I consider the Museum bound by my offer. Mr. Stuart, I'll leave you to settle with your mother in your own way. Goodnight all!" He shoved the bill of sale in his pocket and left quickly.

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An hour later they were still facing each other wearily and angrily across the living room. John Thomas had let himself be bullied into conceding that his mother could take the money, as long as he was not required to touch it. He had given this in exchange, he thought, for permission to accept the job with Lummox.

But she shook her head. "Quite out of the question. After all, you are about to go to college. You couldn't take that beast along. So you had no reason to expect to keep him with you anyhow."

"Huh? But I thought you had meant to take care of him — the way you promised Dad — and I would have seen him on week ends."

"Keep your father out of this! I might as well tell you right now that I made up my mind long ago that the day you went away to school this household would cease to be a zoo. This present mix-up has simply moved up the date a few days."

He stared at her, unable to answer.

Presently she came over and put a hand on his shoulder. "Johnnie?"

"Huh?"

"Look at me, darling. We've had some bitter words and I'm sorry they were ever spoken — I'm sure you did not mean them. But Mum has only been thinking of your welfare, you know that? Don't you?"

VIII

The Stuart house was very old and had a real garret, reached by a ladder and scuttle hole in an upper hallway closet. Once there had been a proper staircase but it had been squeezed out when the landing flat was built on the roof, as the space had been needed for the lazy lift.

But the attic was still there and it was John Thomas's only private place. His room his mother "tidied" sometimes, even though it was his duty (and wish) to do it himself. Anything might happen when Mum tidied. Papers might be lost, destroyed, or even read, for Mum believed that there should be no secrets between parents and children.

So anything he wanted to keep to himself he kept in the attic; Mum never went there — ladders made her dizzy. He had a small, almost airless and very dirty room there which he was supposed to use only for "storage." Its actual uses were varied: he had raised snakes there some years before; there he kept the small collection of books which every boy comes by but does not discuss with parents; he even had a telephone there, an audio extension run from the usual sound-&-sight instrument in his bedroom and he had added a "servant" circuit which flashed a warning light if anyone was listening from any other instrument in the house.

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Tonight he had no wish to call anyone and it was past the hour when direct messages were permitted at the dormitory where Betty lived. He simply wanted to be alone — and to look over some papers he had not looked at in a long time. He fumbled under his work table, flipped a toggle; a panel opened in what appeared to be blank wall. In the cupboard thus exposed were books and papers.

One item was a thin-paper notebook, his great-grandfather's diary of the *Trail Blazer's* second voyage of exploration. John Thomas had read it a dozen times; he supposed that his father and his grandfather had done the same.

He thumbed through it, turning the fragile pages carefully, but browsing rather than reading. His eye lit on one remembered item: "*— some of the lads are panicky, especially the married men. But they should of thought of it before they signed up. Everybody knows the score now; we burst through and came out somewhere not close to home. Who cares? We meant to travel, didn't we?*"

John Thomas turned a few more pages. He had always known the story of the *Trail Blazer;* it produced in him neither awe nor wonder. One of the first interstellar ships, her crew had plied the profession of discovery with the same acceptance of the unknown that had marked the golden days of the Fifteenth Century, when men had braved uncharted seas in wooden vessels. The *Trail Blazer* and her sisters had gone out the same way, burst through the Einstein barrier, taken their chances on getting back. John Thomas Stuart VIII had been aboard her that second voyage, had come home in one piece, married, begat a male child, and settled down — it was he who had built the landing flat on the roof.

Then one night he had heard the call of the wild goose, signed up again. He had not come back.

John Thomas located the first mention of Lummox: "*This planet is a fair imitation of good old Terra, which is a relief after the last three, since we can hit dirt without suiting up. But evolution must have been playing double-or-nothing here; instead of the four-limbed arrangement considered stylish at home practically everything here has at least eight legs — 'mice' that look like centipedes, rabbitlike creatures with six short legs and one pair of tremendous jumping legs, all sorts up to things as big as giraffes. I caught one little fellow (if you can call it that — fact is, he came up and crawled into my lap) and I was so taken with him that I am going to try to keep him as a mascot. He puts me in mind of a dachshund puppy, only better engineered. Cristy had the airlock watch, so I was able to get him aboard without turning him over to Biology.*"

The next day's entry did not mention Lummox, being concerned with a more serious matter: "*We hit the jackpot this time . . . Civilization. The*

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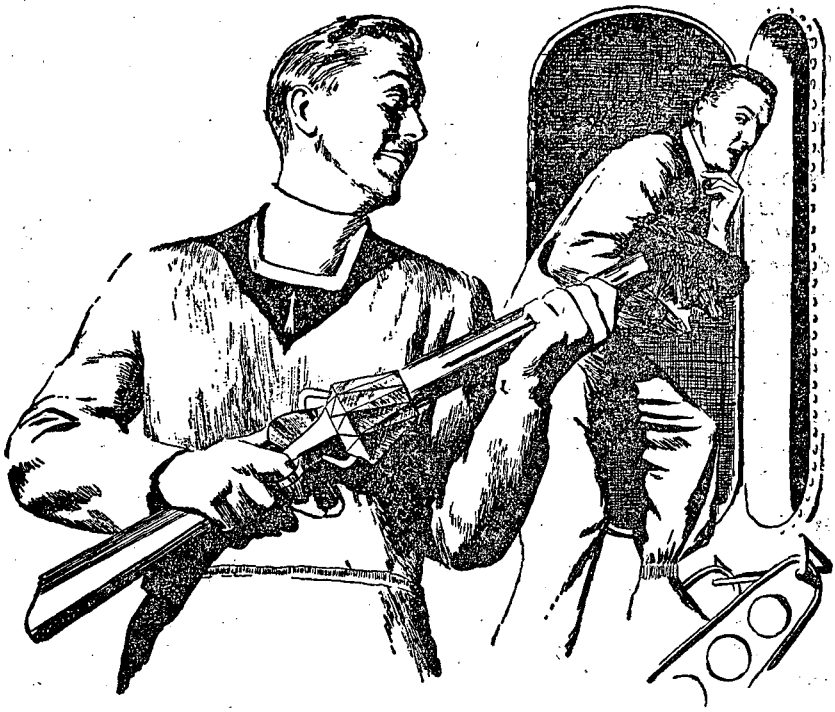

"Christy has the airlock watch, so I was able to get him aboard without turning him over to Biology."

officers are so excited they are almost off their heads. I've seen one of the dominant race at a distance. The same multi-legged pattern, but otherwise making you wonder what would have happened to Earth if the dinosaurs had made good."

Still further on: *"I've been wondering what to feed Cuddlepup. I needn't have worried. He likes everything I've sneaked out of the mess for him — but he will eat anything that is not riveted down. Today he ate my Everlasting stylus and it has me worried. I don't suppose the ink cartridge will poison him but how about the metal and plastic? He's just like a baby; everything he can reach goes in his mouth.*

"Cuddlepuppy gets cuter every day. The little tyke seems to be trying to talk; he whines at me and I whine back at him. Then he crawls into my lap and tells me that he loves me, plain as anything. I'll be switched if I'll let Biology have him, even if they catch me."

The diary skipped a couple of days; the *Trail Blazer* had made an emer-

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gency raise-ship and Assistant Powerman J. T. Stuart had been too busy to write. John Thomas knew why — the negotiations opened so hopefully with the dominant race had failed, no one knew why.

The captain had fled to save his ship and his crew. They had blasted away and had again broken through the Einstein barrier without obtaining from the sentient race the astronomical data they had hoped to get.

There were only a few more entries concerning Lummox-Cuddlepup; John Thomas put the diary aside, finding that reading about Lummox was more than he could stand. He started to put everything back into his hide-away; his hand fell on a small, privately printed book titled *A Few Notes About My Family*. It had been written by his grandfather, John Thomas Stuart IX, and Johnnie's father had brought it up to date before he had gone on his last patrol.

The record started in 1880, with John Thomas Stuart. Who his people had been nobody knew, as he had come from a little Illinois town that kept no birth records in that remote day. He himself had confused the record beyond recovery by running away to sea at fourteen. He had sailed the China trade, lived through beatings and bad food, and eventually had "swallowed the anchor," a retired sea captain of the dying age of sail. He had built the old house John Thomas was in.

John Thomas, Junior, had not gone to sea. Instead he had killed himself flying a boxkite affair termed an "aeroplane." That had been before the first of the World Wars; for several years thereafter the house had received "paying guests."

J. T. Stuart III had died to greater purpose; the submarine of which he was gunnery officer had penetrated Tsushima Straits to the Sea of Japan, but had failed to return.

John Thomas Stuart IV was killed on the first trip to the Moon.

John Thomas V had emigrated to Mars; his son, the famous name in the family, Johnnie skipped over quickly; he had long since grown tired of being reminded that he bore the same name as General Stuart, first governor of the Martian Commonwealth after the revolution.

Much of the book was devoted to an attempt by Johnnie's grandfather to clear the name of his own grandfather — for the son of General Stuart was no public hero; instead he had sweated out his last fifteen years of life in the Triton penal colony. His wife had returned to her family on Earth and taken back her maiden name, for herself and her son.

But her son had gone proudly into court the day he was of age and had had his name changed from "Carlton Gimmidge" to John Thomas Stuart VIII. It was he who had fetched Lummox back and he had used his bonus money from the second trip of the *Trail Blazer* to buy back the old home-

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stead. He had apparently impressed on his own son that his son's grandfather had gotten a dirty deal; the son had made a great point of it in this record.

Johnnie's grandfather could himself have used an advocate to defend his name. The record stated simply that John Thomas Stuart IX had resigned from the service and had never gone into space again, but Johnnie knew that it had been a choice of that or a court martial; his own father had told him . . . but he had told him also that his grandfather could have got off scot-free had be been willing to testify. His father had added, "Johnnie, I'd rather see you loyal to your friends than with your chest decked out in medals."

Johnnie put the books and papers away, feeling dully that it had not done him much good to read about his forebears; Lummox was still on his mind. He guessed he ought to go down and try to get some sleep. . . .

He was turning away as the phone flashed; he grabbed it before the light could change to sound signal; he did not want his mother to wake. "Yes?"

"That you, Johnnie?"

"Yeah. I can't see you Betty; I'm up in the attic."

"That isn't the only reason you can't. I haven't got my face on, so I've got the video switched off. Besides it's pitch-dark in this hallway, since I'm not allowed to phone this time of night. Uh, the Duchess isn't listening, is she?"

Johnnie glanced at his warning signal. "No."

"I'll make this brief. My spies report that Deacon Dreiser got the okay to go ahead."

"*No!*"

"Yes. Point is, what do we do about it? We can't sit still and let him."

"Uh, I've done something."

"What? Nothing silly, I hope. I shouldn't have been away today."

"Well, a Mr. Perkins —"

"Perkins? The chap who went to see Judge O'Farrell tonight?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Look, don't waste time. I always know. Tell me your end."

"Well —" John Thomas gave a confused report. Betty listened without comment, which made him defensive; he found himself expounding the viewpoints of his mother and of Mr. Perkins, rather than his own. "So that's how it was," he finished lamely.

"So you told them to go climb a tree? Good. Now here is our next move. If the Museum can do it, we can do it. It's just a case of getting Grandpa O'Farrell to —"

"Betty, you don't understand. I sold Lummox."

"What? You *sold* Lummox?"

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"Yes. I had to. If I didn't —"

"*You* sold *Lummox*."

"Betty, I couldn't help my —"

But she had switched off on him.

He tried to call back, got a recorded voice that said, "This instrument is out of direct service until tomorrow morning at eight. If you wish to record a message stand by for —" He switched off.

He sat holding his head and wishing he were dead. The worst of it was, Betty was right. He had let himself be badgered into doing something he *knew* was wrong, just because it had seemed that there was nothing else he could do.

Betty had not been fooled. Maybe what she wanted to try wasn't any good either — but she had known a wrong answer when she heard it.

But he sat there, flailing himself but not knowing what to do. The more he thought, the angrier he got. He had let himself be talked into something that wasn't *right* . . . just because it was reasonable . . . just because it was logical . . . just because it was common sense.

The deuce with common sense! His ancestors hadn't used common sense, any of 'em! Who was he to start such a practice?

But what could he *do?*

He could go to Mars. Under the Lafayette Law he was a citizen and could claim land. But how could he get there? Worse, how could he get Lummox there?

The trouble with that, he told himself savagely, is that it almost makes sense. And sense is no use to me.

At last he hit on a plan. It had the one virtue of having no sense to it at all; it was compounded of equal parts of folly and of risk. He felt that granddad would have liked it.

IX

He went down to the upper hallway and listened at his mother's door. He did not expect to hear anything as her bedroom was sound-proofed; the action was instinctive. Then he returned to his own room and made rapid preparations, starting by dressing in camping clothes and mountain boots. His sleeping bag he kept in a drawer of his desk; he got it out, tucked it in a side pocket of his coat and shoved its power pack in a breast pocket. Other items of hiking and camping gear he distributed among other pockets and he was almost ready to go.

He counted his cash and swore softly; his other assets were in a savings account and now he would have no chance to draw from it. Well, it couldn't

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be helped — he started downstairs, then remembered an important matter. He went back to his desk.

"*Dear Mum*," he wrote. "*Please tell Mr. Perkins that the deal is off. You can use my college money to pay back the insurance people. Lum and I are going away and it won't do any good to try to find us. I'm sorry but we have to.*" He looked at the note, decided that there was no more to be said, added "*love*," and signed it.

He started a note to Betty, tore it up, tried again, and finally told himself that he would send her a letter when he had more to say. He went downstairs, left the note on the dining table, then went to the pantry and picked out supplies. A few minutes later, carrying a large sack crammed with tins and packages, he went out to Lummox's house.

His friend was asleep. The watchman eye accepted him; Lummox did not stir. John Thomas hauled back and kicked him as hard as possible. "Hey, Lum! Wake up."

The beast opened his other eyes, yawned daintily, and piped, "Hello, Johnnie."

"Pull yourself together. We're going for a hike."

Lummox extended his legs and stood up, letting a ripple run from head to stern. "All right."

"Make me a seat — and leave room for this." Johnnie held up the bag of groceries. Lummox complied without comment; John Thomas chucked the sack up on the beast, then scrambled up himself. Soon they were on the road in front of the Stuart home.

Almost irrational as he was, John Thomas nevertheless knew that running away and hiding Lummox was a project almost impossible; Lummox anywhere would be about as conspicuous as a bass drum in a bath tub. However there was a modicum of method in his madness; concealing Lummox near Westville was not quite the impossibility it would have been some places.

Westville lay in an open mountain valley; immediately west the backbone of the continent shoved its gaunt ridges into the sky. A few miles beyond the city commenced one of the great primitive areas, thousands of square miles of up-and-down country almost the same as it had been when the Indians greeted Columbus. Save for the short hunting season each year, it was deserted.

If he could get Lummox there without being seen, it was barely possible that they could avoid being caught — until his food supplies ran out. When that time came, well, the possibilities were not thought out; he simply intended to get Lummox under cover and then think about it.

John Thomas could have turned Lummox to the west and set off across

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country toward the mountains, Lummox being no more dependent on pavement than is a tank — but Lummox left a track in soft earth as conspicuous as that of a tank. It was necessary to stay on paved road.

Johnnie had a solution in mind. In an earlier century a transcontinental highway had crossed the mountains here, passing south of Westville and winding ever higher toward the Great Divide. It had long since been replaced by a modern powered road which tunneled through the wall of rock instead of climbing it. But the old road remained, abandoned, overgrown in many places, but still a paved road that would show little sign of Lummox's ponderous progress.

He led Lummox by back ways, avoiding houses and working toward a spot three miles west where the expressway entered the first of its tunnels and the old highway started to climb. He did not go quite to the fork, but stopped a hundred yards short, parked Lummox in front of a vacant lot, warned him not to move, and scouted the lay of the land.

John Thomas found what he thought he remembered: a construction road looping around the junction. It was not paved but was hard-packed granite gravel and he judged that even Lummox's heavy steps would not leave prints. He went back and found Lummox placidly eating a "For Sale" sign. He scolded him and took it away, then decided that he might as well get rid of the evidence and gave it back. They continued while Lummox munched the sign.

Once on the old highway John Thomas relaxed. For the first few miles it was in good repair, for it served homes farther up the canyon. But there was no traffic at this hour. Once or twice an air car passed overhead, but if the passengers noticed the great beast plodding on the road below they gave no sign.

The road meandered up the canyon and came out on a tableland; here was a barrier across the pavement: ROAD CLOSED — VEHICULAR PASSAGE FORBIDDEN BEYOND THIS POINT. Johnnie got down and looked it over. It was a single heavy timber supported at the chest height. "Lummie, can you walk over that without touching it?"

"Sure, Johnnie."

"All right. Take it slowly. You mustn't knock it down. Don't even brush against it."

"I won't, Johnnie." Nor did he. Instead of stepping over it as a horse might step over a lower barrier Lummox retracted pairs of legs in succession and flowed over it.

Johnnie crawled under the barrier and joined him. "I didn't know you could do that."

"Neither did I."

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The road was rough ahead. Johnnie stopped to lash down the groceries with a line under Lummox's keel, then added a bight across his own thighs. "All right, Lummie. Let's have some speed. But don't gallop; I don't want to fall off."

"Hang on, Johnnie!" Lummox picked up speed, retaining his normal foot pattern. He rumbled along at a fast trot, his gait smoothed out by his many legs. Johnnie found that he was very tired, both in body and spirit. He leaned back and Lummox adjusted his contours to him. The swaying motion and steady pounding of massive feet had a soothing effect. Presently he slept.

Lummox went on surefootedly over the broken slabs. He was using his night sight and there was no danger of stumbling in the dark. He knew that Johnnie was asleep and kept his gait as smooth as possible. But in time he got bored and decided on a nap, too. He had not slept well the nights he had spent away from home — always some silliness going on and it had fretted him not to know where Johnnie was. So now he rigged out his guardian eye, closed his others and shifted control over to the secondary brain back in his rump. Lummox proper went to sleep, leaving that minor fraction that never slept to perform the simple tasks of watching for road hazards and of supervising the tireless pounding of his eight great legs.

John Thomas woke as the stars were fading in the morning sky. He stretched his sore muscles and shivered. There were high mountains all around and the road crawled along the side of one, with a sheer drop to a stream far below. He sat up. "Hey, Lummie!"

No answer. He shouted again. This time Lummox answered sleepily, "What's the matter, Johnnie?"

"You've been asleep," he accused.

"You didn't say not to, Johnnie."

"Well — all right. Are we on the same road?"

Lummox consulted his alter ego and answered, "Sure. Did you want another road?"

"No. But we've got to get off this one. It's getting light."

"Why?"

John Thomas did not know how to answer that question; trying to explain to Lummox that he was under sentence of death and must hide did not appeal to him. "We have to, that's why. But just keep going now. I'll let you know."

The stream climbed up to meet them; in a mile or so the road lay only a few feet above it. They came to a place where the stream bed widened out into a boulder field, with water only in a central channel. "Whoa!" called out Johnnie.

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"Breakfast?" inquired Lummox.

"Not yet. See those rocks down there?"

"Yes."

"I want you to step wide onto those rocks. Don't put your big feet on that soft shoulder dirt. Step from the pavement to the rocks. Get me?"

"Don't leave tracks?" Lummox asked doubtfully.

"That's right. If anybody comes along and sees tracks, you'll have to go back downtown again — because they'll follow the tracks and find us. See?"

"I won't leave any tracks, Johnnie."

Lummox went down onto the dry stream bed like a gargantuan inchworm. The maneuver caused John Thomas to grab for his safety line with one hand and for his supplies with the other. He yelped.

Lummox stopped and said, "You all right, Johnnie?"

"Yes. You just surprised me. Upstream now and stay on the rocks." They followed the stream, found a place to cross, then followed it on the other side. It swung away from the road and soon they were several hundred yards from it. It was now almost broad daylight and John Thomas was beginning to worry about air reconnaissance.

Up ahead a grove of lodgepole pines came down to the bank. It seemed dense enough; even if Lummox were not invisible in it, nevertheless holding still he would look like a big, mountain-country boulder. "Up the bank and into those trees, Lum, and don't break the bank down. Step easy."

They entered the grove and stopped; Johnnie dismounted. Lummox tore down a branch of pine and started to eat. It reminded John Thomas that he himself had not eaten lately but he was so dead tired that he was not hungry. He wanted to sleep, really sleep . . . not half awake and clutching a safety line.

But he was afraid that if he let Lummox graze while he slept the big stupid lunk would wander into the open and be spotted. "Lummie? Let's take a nap before we have breakfast."

"Why?"

"Well, Johnnie's awful tired. You just lie down here and I'll put my sleeping bag beside you. Then when we wake up, we'll eat."

"Not eat until you wake up?"

"That's it."

"Well . . . all right," Lummox said regretfully.

John Thomas took his sleeping bag out of his pocket, flipped the light membrane open, and plugged in the power pack. He set the thermostat and switched it on, then while it heated he inflated the mattress side. The thin mountain air made it heavy work; he stopped with it only partly blown up and peeled off all his clothes. Shivering in the frosty air he slid inside, closed

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it to a nose hole. "G'night, Lummie," he said as he closed his eyes and sighed.

"G'night, Johnnie."

Mr. Kiku slept badly and was up early. He breakfasted without disturbing his wife and went to the Spatial Affairs hall, arriving while the great building was quiet except for the handful on night duty. Seated at his desk, he tried to think.

His subconscious had been nagging him all night, telling him that he had missed something important. Something young Greenberg had said . . . something about the Rargyllian believing that the Hroshii, with only one ship, were a serious menace to Earth. Mr. Kiku had discounted it as a clumsy attempt by the snake boy to bluff from weakness. Not that it mattered; the negotiation was about over — the one remaining detail being to set up permanent relations with the Hroshii.

His subconscious had not thought so.

He leaned to his desk and spoke to the night communications supervisor. "Kiku. Call the Hotel Universal. There's a Dr. Ftaeml there, a Rargyllian. As soon as he orders breakfast I want to talk to him. No, don't wake him, a man is entitled to his rest."

Having done what could be done, he turned to the mind-soothing routine of clearing up accumulated work.

His incoming basket was empty for the first time in some days when his desk communicator showed a blinking red light.

"Kiku here."

"Sir," the face said anxiously, "on that call to Hotel Universal. Dr. Ftaeml did not order breakfast."

"Sleeping late perhaps. His privilege."

"No, sir. I mean he skipped breakfast. He's on his way to space port."

"How long ago?"

"Five to ten minutes. I just found out."

"Very well. Call space port, tell them not to clear his ship. Make certain that they understand that it has diplomatic clearance and that they must actually do something — not just scratch its clearance on the board and go back to sleep. Then reach Dr. Ftaeml himself — my compliments to the Doctor and will he do me the honor of waiting a few minutes to see me? I am on my way to the port."

"Yes, sir!"

"That done, there is a matter of a special efficiency report for you . . . uh, Znedov, is it? Make out the form and grade yourself; I want to see your opinion of yourself."

At the space port Dr. Ftaeml was waiting out on the passengers' promen-

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ade, watching the ships and pretending to smoke a cigar. Mr. Kiku came up and bowed. "Good morning, Doctor. It was most gentle of you to wait for me."

The Rargyllian tossed the cigar aside. "The honor is mine, sir. To be attended at the port by a person of your rank and pressing duties . . ." He finished with a shrug which expressed both surprise and pleasure.

"I will not keep you long. But I had promised myself the pleasure of seeing you today and I had not known that you intended to leave."

"My fault, Mr. Under Secretary. I had intended to pop up and pop back and then to wait your pleasure this afternoon."

"Good. Well, perhaps by tomorrow I shall be able to present an acceptable solution of this problem."

Ftaeml was plainly surprised. "Successful?"

"I hope so. The data you provided yesterday have given us a new clue."

"Do I understand that you have *found* the missing Hroshia?"

"Possibly. Do you know the fable of the Ugly Duckling?"

" 'Ugly Duckling'?" The Rargyllian seemed to be searching his files. "Yes, I know the idiom."

"Mr. Greenberg, following the clue you provided, has gone to fetch the Ugly Duckling. If by wild chance it turns out to be the swan that we are seeking, then . . ." Mr. Kiku gave a shrug unconsciously like that of Ftaeml.

The Rargyllian seemed to have trouble believing it. "And is it the . . . 'swan,' Mr. Under Secretary?"

"We will see. Logic says that it must be; probability says that it cannot be."

"Mmmm . . . and may I report this to my clients?"

"Suppose we wait until I hear from Mr. Greenberg. He has left Capital to investigate. Can I reach you through the scout ship?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Uh, Doctor — there was one more thing."

"Yes, sir?"

"You made an odd remark to Mr. Greenberg last night . . . supposedly a joke — or perhaps an accident. You said something about Earth being 'volatilized.' "

For a moment the Rargyllian said nothing. When he did speak he changed the subject. "Tell me, sir, in what way does logic state that your 'Ugly Duckling' is a swan?"

Mr. Kiku spoke carefully. "A Terran ship visited a strange planet at the time defined by your data. The dominant race could have been Hroshii; the identification is not exact except as to time. A life form was removed and

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brought here. This being is still alive after more than one hundred twenty years; Mr. Greenberg has gone to fetch it for identification by your principals."

Dr. Ftaeml said softly, "It must be. I did not believe it but it *must* be." He went on, louder and quite cheerfully, "Sir, you have made me happy."

"Indeed?"

"Very. You have also made it possible for me to speak freely."

"You have always been free to speak, Doctor, so far as we were concerned. I do not know what instructions you have from your clients."

"They have placed no check on my tongue. But — you are aware, sir, that the customs of a race are implicit in its speech?"

"I have sometimes had cause to suspect so," Mr. Kiku answered drily.

"To be sure. If you visited a friend in a hospital, knowing him to be dying, knowing that you could not help him, would you speak to him of his doom?"

"No. Not unless he brought up the subject."

"Precisely! Speaking to you and to Mr. Greenberg I was perforce bound by your customs."

"Dr. Ftaeml," Mr. Kiku said slowly, "let us be blunt. Am I to believe that you are convinced that this single foreign ship could do a serious damage to this planet, with its not inconsiderable defenses?"

"I will be blunt, sir. Should the Hroshii eventually conclude that, through the actions of this planet or some member of its culture, their Hroshia had died or was forever lost, Earth would not be damaged; Earth would be destroyed."

"By this one ship?"

"Unassisted."

Mr. Kiku shook his head. "Doctor, I am sure that you are convinced of what you say. I am not. The extent and thoroughness of the defenses of this, the leading planet of the Federation, cannot possibly be known to you. But should they be so foolish they will learn that we have teeth."

Ftaeml looked sorrowful. "In all the many tongues of civilization I find no words to convince you. But believe me — anything that you could do against them would be as futile as throwing stones at one of your modern warships."

"We shall see. Or, fortunately, we shall not see. Have you spoken to them of the willingness of the Federation to accept them into the Community of Civilizations?"

"I have had grave difficulty in explaining to them the nature of your offer."

"Are they, then, so hopelessly warlike?"

"They are not warlike at all. How can I put it? Are you warlike when you

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smash . . . strike . . . swat — yes, swat a fly? The Hroshii are practically immortal by your standards, and even by mine. They are so nearly invulnerable to all ordinary hazards that they tend to look down — how is your idiom? — 'Olympian' — they look down on us from Olympian heights. They cannot see any purpose in relations with lesser races; therefore your proposal was not taken seriously, though, believe me, I put it."

"They sound stupid," Kiku answered sourly.

"Not true, sir. They evaluate your race and mine most exactly. They know that any culture possessing star travel has at least some minor skill in the physical arts. They know therefore that you will regard yourselves as powerful. For that reason they are even now contemplating a display of force, to convince you that you must forthwith deliver up their Hroshia — they think of this as being like a goad to a draft animal, a sign which he will be able to understand."

"Hmm. . . . You know the nature of this demonstration?"

"I do. My trip this morning to their ship is to persuade them to wait. They intend to touch lightly the face of your satellite, leave on it an incandescent mark perhaps a thousand miles long, to convince you that they . . . uh — 'ain't foolin.'"

"I am not impressed. We could order a force of ships and make such a sign ourselves. Not that we would."

"Could you do it with one ship, in a matter of seconds, without fuss, from a distance of a quarter million miles?"

"You think they could?"

"A minor demonstration. Mr. Under Secretary, there are novae in their part of the sky which were not accidents of nature."

Mr. Kiku hesitated. If it all were true, then such a demonstration might serve his own needs by causing the Hroshii to show their hand. The loss of a few worthless lunar mountains would not matter — but it would be difficult to evacuate such an area of even the few who might be in it. "Have you told them that our Moon is inhabited?"

"It is not inhabited by their Hroshia, which is all that matters to them."

"Hmm . . . I suppose so. Doctor, could you suggest to them, first, that you may be about to find their Hroshia, and second, that their Hroshia may be somewhere on our satellite, which is why the search has taken so long?"

The Rargyllian simulated a wide human grin. "Sir, I salute you. I shall be happy to convey such a suggestion. I am sure there will be no demonstration of force."

"Good health, Doctor. I'll be in touch with you."

"Your good health, sir."

On his way back Mr. Kiku realized that he had felt not a single twinge in

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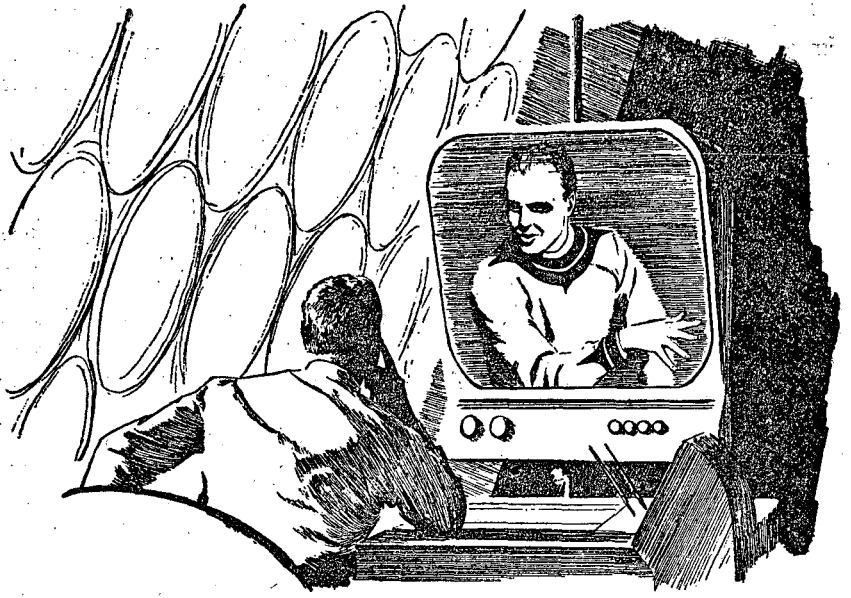

"He's ordered them to kill on sight and has posted a reward for the ship making the kill."

the presence of the medusoid — why, the blighter was rather likable, in a horrid way. Dr. Morgan was certainly an adroit hypnotherapist.

His work basket was choked as usual; he put the Hroshii out of mind and worked happily. Late that afternoon communications informed him that they held a circuit for Mr. Greenberg. "Put him on," Mr. Kiku said.

"Boss?" Greenberg began.

"Eh? Yes, Sergei. What the deuce are you looking upset about?"

"Because I'm wondering how I'm going to like it in the Outer Legion."

"Quit trying to break it gently. What happened?"

"The bird has flown."

"Flown? Where?"

"I wish I knew. The most likely place is a forest preserve west of here."

"Then why are you wasting time telling me? Get in there and find it."

Greenberg sighed. "I knew you would say that. Look, boss, this haystack has over ten million acres in it, tall trees, tall mountains, and no roads. And the local police chief is there ahead of me, with all his own men and half the sheriffs' deputies in the state. He's ordered them to kill on sight and has posted a reward for the ship making the kill."

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"*What?*"

"Just what I said. Your authorization to carry out the judgment of the court came through; the cancellation of it got lost — how, I don't know. But the acting chief is an old relic with the soul of a file clerk; he points to the order and won't budge — he won't even let me call them on police frequency. With our intervention withdrawn I haven't an ounce of authority to force him."

"You are accepting that, I suppose?" Mr. Kiku said bitterly. "Just waiting for it to blow up in your face?"

"Just about. I've got a call in for the mayor — he's out of town. Another for the governor — he's in a closed grand jury session. And another for the chief forest ranger — I think he's out after the reward. As soon as I switch off I'm going to twist the arm of the acting chief until he sees the light and —"

"You should be doing that now."

"I won't dally. I called to suggest that you turn on heat from back there. I need help."

"You'll get it."

"Not just to reach the governor, not just to start a fresh intervention. Even after we reach this wild police chief and persuade him to call off his dogs I'll still need help. Ten million acres of mountains, boss — it means men and ships, lots of men, lots of ships. It's no job for one man with a brief case. Besides, I'm going to join the Outer Legion."

"We'll both join," Kiku said glumly. "All right, get on it. Move."

"It's been nice knowing you."

Mr. Kiku switched off, then moved very fast, initiating a fresh departmental intervention, sending an emergency-priority message to the state governor, another to the mayor of Westville, another to the Westville district court. Formal action completed, he sat for a few seconds, bracing himself for what he must do next — then went in to tell the Secretary that they must ask for help from the military authorities of the Federation.

X

When John Thomas woke up he had trouble remembering where he was. The sleeping bag was toasty warm, he felt good, rested but lazy. Gradually the picture of where he was and why he was there built up and he poked his head out. The sun was high and it was pleasantly warm. Lummox was nearby. "Hi, Lummie."

"Hi, Johnnie. You slept a long time. You were noisy, too."

"Was I?" He crawled out and pulled his clothes on, switched off the sleep-

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ing bag. He folded it and turned to Lummox — and stared. "What's *that?*"

Near Lummox's head, lying squashed out as if it had been stepped on, was a very dead grizzly bear — about a 600-pound male. Blood had gushed from mouth and nostrils, then dried. Lummox glanced at it. "Breakfast," he explained.

John Thomas looked at it with distaste. "Not for me, it's not. Where did you get it?"

"I catched it," Lummox answered and simpered.

"Not 'catched it' — 'caught it.' "

"But I did catch it. It tried to get in with you and I catched it."

"Well, all right. Thanks." John Thomas looked at the bear again, turned away and opened his food bag. He selected a can of ham and eggs, twisted off the top, and waited for it to heat.

Lummox took this as a signal that it was now all right for him to breakfast, too, which he did — first the bear, then a couple of small pine trees, a peck or so of gravel for crunchiness, and the empty container of John Thomas's breakfast. They went down to the stream afterwards, with Johnnie going first to search the sky; Lummox washed down his meal with a few hogsheads of clear mountain water. Johnnie knelt and drank, then washed his face and hands and wiped them on his shirt. Lummox asked, "What do we do now, Johnnie? Go for a walk? Catch things, maybe?"

"No," Johnnie denied. "We go back up in those trees and lie low until dark. You've got to pretend you're a rock." He went up the bank, Lummox followed. "Settle down," John Thomas ordered. "I want to look at those bumps."

Lummox did so; it brought the tumors down where his master could inspect them without stretching. They were larger and seemed to have lumps and bumps inside; Johnnie tried to remember whether such a development was a sign of malignancy. The skin over them had stretched and thinned until it was hardly more than thick leather, not in the least like the rest of Lummox's armor. It was dry and hot to the touch. Johnnie kneaded the left one gently; Lummox pulled away.

"Is it that tender?" Johnnie asked anxiously.

"I can't *stand* it," Lummox protested. He extended his legs and walked over to a large pine tree, started rubbing the tumor against it.

"Hey!" said Johnnie. "Don't do that! You'll hurt yourself."

"But it *itches*." Lummox went on scratching.

John Thomas ran to him, intending to be firm. But just as he reached him the tumor split open. He watched in horror.

Something dark and wet and writhing emerged, caught on the ruptured

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skin, then burst free to dangle and flop like a jungle snake from a branch. For an agonized moment all that Johnnie could think was that it was indeed something like that — some giant parasitic worm eating its way out of its unlucky host. He thought with dumb self-blame that he had forced Lummie to climb over the mountains — when he was sick to death with *that.*

Lummox sighed and wiggled. "Gee!" he said with satisfaction. "That *feels* better!"

"Lummox! Are you all right?"

"Huh? Why shouldn't I be, Johnnie?"

"Why, why, *that!*"

"What?" Lummox looked around; the strange growth bent forward and he glanced at it. "Oh, that —" he answered, dismissing the matter.

The end of the thing opened out like a blossoming flower — and Johnnie realized at last what it was.

Lummox had grown an arm.

The arm dried rapidly, lightened in color and seemed to firm. Lummox did not have much control over it yet, but John Thomas could begin to see its final form. It had two elbows, a distinct hand with thumbs on each side. There were five fingers, seven digits in all, and the middle finger was longer and fully flexible, like an elephant's trunk. The hand did not resemble a human hand much but there was no doubt that it was at least as useful — or would become so; at the moment the digits wiggled aimlessly.

Lummox let him examine it, but did not himself seem especially interested in the development; Lummox acted as if it were something he always did right after breakfast.

Johnnie said, "Let me have a look at the other bump," and walked around Lummox. The right side tumor was still more bloated. When John Thomas touched it Lummox shrugged away and turned as if to rub it against the tree. "Hold it!" Johnnie called out. "Stand still."

"I've *got* to scratch."

"You might lame yourself for life. Hold still, I want to try something." Lummox sulkily complied; Johnnie took out his belt knife and gently nicked the center of the swelling.

The nick spread and Lummox's right arm came out almost in Johnnie's face. He jumped back.

"Thanks, Johnnie!"

"Any time, any time." He sheathed the knife and stared at the newborn arms, his face thoughtful.

He could not figure all the implications of Lummox's unexpected acquisition of hands. But he did realize that it was going to change things a

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lot. In what way, he did not know. Perhaps Lummie would not need so much care after this. On the other hand he might have to be watched or he would be forever getting into things he shouldn't. He remembered uneasily someone saying what a blessing it was cats did not have hands . . . well, Lummie had more curiosity than any cat.

But he felt without knowing why that such things were side issues; this was *important*.

In any case, he decided fiercely, this doesn't change one thing: Chief Dreiser isn't going to get another crack at him!

He searched the sky through the branches and wondered if they could be spotted. "Lum —"

"Yes, Johnnie?"

"Haul in your legs. It's time to play like a rock."

"Aw, Johnnie!"

"Look, you don't want to go downtown again, do you?"

"Well, if you feel that way about it." Lummox settled to the ground. John Thomas sat down, leaned against him, and thought.

Maybe there was a way in this for Lummie and him to make a living — in a carnival or something. E.-t.s were big stuff in carnivals; they couldn't run without them — even though half of them were fakes. Probably Lum could learn to do tricks with his hands, play something or something.

No, that wasn't the thing for Lummie; crowds made him nervous. Uh, what could the two of them do to make a living? — after this mess with the authorities was straightened out, of course. A farm, maybe? Lummie would be better than a tractor and with hands he would be a farm hand, too. Maybe that was the ticket, even if he had never thought about farming.

In his mind's eye he saw himself and Lummox growing great fields of grain . . . and hay . . . and vegetables and—

He was awakened by a cracking noise and knew vaguely that he had heard several of them. He opened his eyes, looked around and found that he was lying beside Lummox. The creature had not left the spot — but he was moving his arms. One arm flailed past Lummox's head, there was a blur and another crack — and a small aspen some distance away suddenly came down. Several others were down near it.

John Thomas scrambled to his feet. "Hey, stop that!"

Lummox stopped. "What's the matter, Johnnie?" he asked in a hurt voice. There was a pile of rocks in front of him; he was just reaching for one.

"Don't throw rocks at trees."

"But you do, Johnnie."

"Yes, but I don't ruin them. It's all right to eat trees, but don't just spoil them."

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"I'll eat them. I was going to."

"All right." Johnnie looked around. It was dusk, they could start again in a few minutes. "Go ahead and have them for supper. Here, wait a minute." He examined Lummox's arms. They were the same color as the rest of him, and beginning to get armor hard. But the most striking change was that they were twice as thick as they had been at first — as big around as Johnnie's thighs. Most of the loose hide had sloughed off; Johnnie found that he could tear off the rest. "Okay. Chow time."

Lummox finished the aspens in the time it took John Thomas to prepare and eat his simple meal, and was ready to eat the empty container as a sweet. It was dark by then; they took to the road

The second night was even less eventful than the first. It grew steadily colder as they wound ever higher; presently Johnnie plugged the power pack of his sleeping bag into his suit. Shortly he was warm and drowsy. "Lum . . . if I go to sleep, call me when it starts to get light."

"Okay, Johnnie." Lummox stored the order in his after brain, just in case. Cold did not bother him, he was not conscious of it, as his body thermostat was more efficient than was Johnnie's — even more efficient than the one controlling the power pack.

John Thomas dozed and woke up and dozed. He was dozing when Lummox called him, just as the first rays brushed distant peaks. Johnnie sat up and began watching for a place to pull out and hide. Luck was against him; it was straight up on one side and the other side hung over a deep, dismal drop. As minutes wore away and it turned broad daylight he began to get panicky.

But there was nothing to do but plod ahead.

A stratoship passed in the distance. He could hear the thunderclap, but he could not see it; he could only hope that it was not scanning for him. A few minutes later, while searching all around, he spotted behind them a dot that he hoped was an eagle.

Very soon he was forced to admit that it was a single human in a flight harness. "Stop, Lummox! Pull over to the wall. You're a landslide."

"A landslide, Johnnie?"

"Shut up and do it!" Lummox shut up and did it. John Thomas slid down and hid behind Lummox's head, making himself small. He waited for the flier to pass over.

The flier did not pass, but swooped in a familiar shoot-the-works style and came in for a landing. Johnnie sighed with relief as Betty Sorenson landed on the spot he had just vacated. She called out, "Howdy, Lummie," then turned to Johnnie, put her hands on her hips and said, "Well! Aren't you a pretty sight! Running off without telling me!"

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"Uh, I meant to, Slugger, I really did. But I didn't have a chance to — I'm sorry."

She dropped her fierce expression and smiled. "Never mind. I think better of you than I have in some time. At least you did *something*. Johnnie, I was afraid you were just a big lummox yourself — pushed around by anybody."

John Thomas decided not to argue, being too pleased to see her to take offense. "Uh . . . well, anyway, how did you manage to spot us?"

She shrugged. "The old rule: I thought like a mule and went where the mule would. I knew you would be along this road, so I started out at barely 'can-see' and swooped along it. And if you don't want to be caught in the next few minutes we had better boost out of here and get under cover. Come on! Lummie old boy, start your engines."

She put down a hand and Johnnie swung aboard; the procession started up. "I've been trying to get off the road," Johnnie explained nervously, "but we haven't come to a spot."

"I see. Well, hold your breath, 'cause around this bend is Adam-and-Eve falls and we can get off the road just above them."

"Oh, is that where we are?"

"Yes." Betty leaned forward in a futile attempt to see around a rock shoulder ahead. So doing, she caught her first glimpse of Lummox's arms. She grabbed John Thomas. "Johnnie! There's a boa constrictor on Lummie!"

"What? Don't be silly. That's just his right arm."

"His *what*?"

"Level off and quit grabbing me. I said 'arm' — those tumor things were arms."

"The tumors . . . were arms? Tell him to stop. I got to see this."

"How about getting under cover? There are the falls."

They passed the falls; the floor of the canyon thereby came up to meet them. John Thomas took the first chance to get off the road, a spot like their bivouac of the day before. While he prepared breakfast, Betty examined Lummox's brand-new arms.

"Lummox," she said reprovingly, "you didn't tell mama about this."

"You didn't ask me," he objected.

"Excuses, always excuses. Well, what can you do with them?"

"I can throw rocks. Johnnie, is it all right?"

"No!" John Thomas said hastily. "Betty, how do you want your coffee?"

"Just bare-footed," she answered absently and went on inspecting the limbs. There was a notion hovering in her mind about them, but it would not light — which annoyed her. Oh well . . . breakfast first.

After they had fed the dirty dishes to Lummox, Betty lounged back and

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said to John Thomas, "Problem child, have you any idea what a storm you have stirred up?"

"Uh, I guess I've got Chief Dreiser's goat."

"Goat! Johnnie, Dreiser has put out a general alarm and offered a reward for Lummie, alive or dead — preferably dead. They are serious about it, Johnnie — terribly serious. So whatever plan you had we now junk and shift to a good one. What did you have in mind?"

John Thomas turned pale and answered slowly, "Well — I meant to keep on like this for a night or two, until we reached a place to hide."

She shook her head. "No good. In their stumbling, official way they will have concluded by now that this is where you would head and they will search this forest tree by tree. They really mean it, chum."

"You didn't let me finish. You know that old uranium mine? The Power and Glory? That's where we're heading. I can put Lummox completely out of sight there; the main tunnel is big enough."

"Flashes of sense in that. But not good enough."

"Well? If that's no good, what do we do?"

"Pipe down. I'm thinking." She lay still, staring up at the deep blue mountain sky. "You didn't solve anything by running away."

"No — but I sure mixed it up."

"Yes, and so far so good. We've got to gain time. Your notion of the Power and Glory Mine isn't too bad; it will do until I can make better arrangements."

"I don't see why they would ever find him there. It's about as lonely as you can get."

"Which is why it is sure to be searched. Oh, it might fool Deacon Dreiser; but he's dug up an air posse the size of a small army. I found you, they will find you. I did it by knowing what makes you tick, whereas they have to work by logic, which is slower. They'll find you — and that's the end of Lummox."

John Thomas considered the dismal prospect. "Then what's the sense of hiding him in the mine?"

"Just to gain a day or so. Look — do you remember the Cygnus Decision?"

"The Cygnus Decision? We had it in elementary Customs of Civilization?"

"Yes. Quote it."

"What is this? A mid-semester quiz?" John Thomas frowned and dug into his memory. " 'Beings possessed of speech and manipulation must be presumed to be sentient and therefore to have innate human rights, unless conclusively proved otherwise.' " He sat up. "Hey! They can't kill Lummox — he's got hands!"

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XI

"Mind your air speed," she cautioned. "Do you know the old one about the man whose lawyer assured him that they could not put him in jail for *that?*"

"What was 'that'?"

"Never mind. His client answered, 'But, counsellor, I'm *speaking* from the jail.' Point is, the Cygnus Decision is just theory; we've got to keep Lummox out of sight until we can get the court to change its mind."

"Unh, I see. I guess you're right—" He broke off suddenly. "Hear anything?"

She listened, then nodded solemnly.

"How fast?"

"Not over two hundred."

"Then they are scanning. Lummox! Don't move a muscle!"

"I won't, Johnnie. Why not move a muscle?"

"Don't get excited," Betty advised. "They're probably just laying out their search pattern. Chances are they couldn't identify us either in the scope or visually with these trees to break up the image." But she looked worried. "I wish Lummie were already in the mine tunnel, though. If anyone is smart enough to run a selective scan straight down that road while we're on it tonight . . ."

John Thomas was leaning forward, cupping his ears with both hands. "Hush!" he whispered, "Betty — they're coming back!"

"Don't panic. It's probably the other leg of the search pattern."

But even as she said it she knew that she was wrong. The sound came over them, hovered and dropped in pitch. They looked up, but the denseness of the forest and the altitude of the craft kept them from seeing it.

Suddenly there was a light so bright that it made the sharp sunlight seem dusky when it passed. Betty gulped. "What was *that?*"

"Ultraflash photo," he answered soberly. "They're checking what they picked up on the scope."

The sound above them squealed higher, then dropped; the eyeburning flash occurred again. "Stereoed it," Johnnie announced solemnly. "They'll really see us now, if they only suspected before."

"Johnnie, we've got to get Lummox out of here!"

"How? Take him up on the road and let them pinpoint him with a bomb? No, kid, our only hope now is that they decide he is a big boulder — I'm glad I made him stay tucked in." He added, "We mustn't move, either. They may go away."

Even that outside hope passed. One after another, four more ships were

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heard. Johnnie ticked them off. "That one has taken station to the south. The third one was north, I think. Now they'll cover to the west . . . a pinwheel guard. They've got us boxed, Slugger."

She looked at him, her face dead white. "What do we do, Johnnie?"

"Huh? Why, noth — No, Betty, look. You duck down through the trees to the creek. Take your flight harness with you. Then follow the stream a good distance and take to the air. Keep low until you get out from under their umbrella. They'll let you go — they don't want you."

"And what will *you* be doing?"

"Me? I stay here."

"What do you think you can do? You don't even have a gun."

"Look, Slugger, there isn't time to argue. You get clear and fast. I stay with Lummox; that's my privilege. He's mine."

She burst into tears. "And you're *mine*, you big stupid oaf."

He tried to answer her and could not. His face began to break in the spasmodic movements of a man trying to control tears. Lummox stirred uneasily. "What's the matter, Johnnie?" he piped.

"Huh?" John Thomas replied in a choked voice. "Nothing." He reached up and patted his friend. "Nothing at all, old fellow. Johnnie's here. It's all right."

"Yes," agreed Betty faintly. "It's all right, Lummie." She added in a low voice to John Thomas. "It'll be quick, won't it, Johnnie. We won't feel it?"

"Uh, I guess so. Hey! None of that — in just one half second I'm going to punch you right on the button . . . and then dump you off the bank. That ought to protect you from the blast."

A sudden thunderclap spared her the need to answer. It was followed by the squeal of a hovering ship; this time they could see it, less than a thousand feet over their heads. Then an iron voice rumbled out of the sky. "Stuart! John Stuart! Come out in the open!"

Johnnie took out his sheath knife, threw back his head and shouted, "Come and get me!"

The man behind the giant voice seemed to have a directional mike trained on him; he was answered: "We don't want you and we don't want to hurt anybody. Give up and come out."

He threw back a one-word defiance and added, "We aren't coming out!"

The thundering voice went on, "Final warning, John Stuart. Come out with your hands empty. We'll send a ship down for you."

John Thomas shouted back, "Send it down and we'll wreck it!" He added hoarsely to Lummox, "Got some rocks, Lummie?"

"Huh? Sure! Now, Johnnie?"

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"Not yet. I'll tell you."

The voice remained silent; no ship came down to them. Instead a ship other than the command ship dropped swiftly, squatted a hundred feet above the pines and about the same direction from them laterally. It started a slow circle around them, almost a crawl.

Immediately there was a rending sound, then a crash as a forest giant toppled to the ground. Another followed at once. Like a great invisible hand a drag field from the ship knocked over trees and swept them aside. Slowly it cut a wide firebreak around them. "Why are they doing that?" Betty whispered.

"It's a forestry service ship. They're cutting us off."

"But why? Why don't they just do it and get it over with?" She began to shake, he put an arm around her.

The ship closed the circle, then faced them and seemed to settle back on its haunches. With the delicate care of a dentist pulling a tooth the operator reached in, selected one tree, plucked it out of the ground, and tossed it aside. He picked another — and still another. Gradually a wide path was being cut through the timber to the spot where they waited.

And there was nothing to do but wait. The ranger's ship removed the last tree that shielded them; the tractor field brushed them as he claimed it, making them stagger and causing Lummox to squeal with terror.

The logging ship lay off; an attack ship moved in. It dropped suddenly and touched ground at the end of the corridor. Johnnie gulped and said, "*Now*, Lummox. Anything that comes out of that ship — see if you can hit it."

"You bet, Johnnie!" Lummox reached with both hands for ammunition.

But he never picked up the rocks. John Thomas felt as if he had been dumped into wet concrete up to his chest; Betty gasped and Lummox squealed. Then he piped, "Johnnie! The rocks are stuck!"

John Thomas labored to speak. "It's all right, boy. Don't struggle. Just hold still. Betty, you all right?"

"Can't breathe!" she gasped.

"Don't fight it. They've got us."

The startling, dramatic, final installment of Star Lummox will appear in next month's F&SF. In this concluding sequence, Mr. Kiku faces the Hroshii once again; but this time he has to contend not only with the powerful invaders, but also with an angry group of earthmen who threaten to tip the dangerously balanced scales of diplomacy towards all-out war!

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It was that most hard-headed and realistic of mystery writers, Bernice Carey, who called our attention to this gem of science-fantasy in Punch. *Which is as it should be: there is something very hard-headed indeed about this sober account of a devout fisherman who was able to keep first things first, even when disturbed by an interplanetary interruption.*

Visitors From Venus

by T. S. WATT

I MUST ADMIT that I have been rather surprised by the amount of curiosity and speculation aroused by a recent story of an encounter with a party of explorers from the planet Venus. It seems, however, that the affair is undoubtedly regarded as something quite out of the ordinary, and therefore it may be that an old angler's account of a similar experience will not be without interest.

Two years ago last July I spent a few days on the Hawther, a north country sea-trout river. One evening, as I was walking along the riverside with a friend, I was very much surprised to see, hovering above the tail of the pool we intended to fish, a large circular object, much about the same shape as a child's humming-top. It had a metallic lustre, and as it hovered it emitted a subdued droning rather like that of a bee.

"Can it be one of these flying saucers?" I said to Walters.

"Whatever it is," said Walters, "we won't do much good in Lilyholm now. I'm going to carry on down to Plane Tree."

I decided, nevertheless, to fish Lilyholm. For one thing, it is my favourite pool, and for another, I felt that it would do no harm to keep an eye on whoever might be inside this strange machine. I am no dog-in-the-manger, but there are some people who seem to think that they can throw a fly here, there and everywhere without the formality of taking out licence or permit, often getting in the way of anglers like myself, who have paid good money to do so. When we reached the pool, therefore, and Walters, with an irritable glare at the strange object poised over the quiet waters, passed on down the river, I stopped short and began to knot a Peter Ross to the end of my cast. I use the Turle for this purpose, and I was just easing the

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loop over the fly's head, holding the dressing carefully between finger and thumb, when I noticed that the droning noise was increasing in volume. Looking up, I saw that the machine was moving towards me. It passed over my head at a height of about twenty feet, a cable was thrown out, and in another moment a figure had slid down and was walking across the meadow in my direction.

"Good evening," he said. "We're from Venus."

"Excuse me a minute," I said.

I once lost a good fish through a carelessly tied knot. Never again. I drew the loop tight, gave the fly a strong, steady pull, and clipped off an end of gut with my scissors.

"Now then," I said. "Sorry to keep you waiting. I come from Shrewsbury. My name's Carter."

The fellow was dressed in an ordinary lounge suit, perhaps a bit gaudy for the river, and the only odd thing I could see about him was that he wore two waistcoat buttons unfastened instead of one, and that his eyes were set vertically in his forehead, not horizontally.

"Corp," he said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"My name's Corp."

"How d'you do," I said.

One thing I have learnt on the river, from bitter experience, is to avoid getting into conversation with strangers. If I have heard the phrase "I'd never have the patience" once, I have heard it 10,000 times. I gave another steady pull at my fly, put away my scissors, and buckled the flap over my fishing bag. "Well —" I began.

"What are you all doing?" he asked.

"There are only the two of us," I said, "and we're just starting. Yesterday everything was completely dead."

"All this squabbling and fighting," he said. "That's simply an elaborate camouflage, of course, and a rather childish one too, if you don't mind my saying so. We realized long ago that there couldn't be any other possible explanation. But what is the real scheme? What are you all aiming at?"

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow," I said. "Both Walters and I are staying at the hotel, and it's quite peaceful there, except for an oafish braggart named Tupman."

He winked at me with his lower eye. I must say it looked extraordinarily odd. "I suppose you're right to be cautious," he said. "Still, we'd hoped to glean something. I've got a wonderful team with me, and we've been through some pretty grim experiences together. We had to listen to your radio for six months to learn English. Not a man dropped out."

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"Yes, yes," I said. (I didn't want to be rude to the fellow, but it was getting dark, and every moment counted.) "Well, perhaps I'll see you later at the hotel. Just follow the river up for about a mile. You can't miss it. I'll really have to get started now. Dusk, you know. A very deadly time." And with that I left him.

I hadn't been fishing for more than twenty minutes before Masters, the water bailiff, turned up.

"Those gentlemen with the machine, Mr. Carter," he said. "Are they with you?"

"What gentlemen, Masters?" I asked. (I'd had a fish on for a minute or so, just after starting, and I must admit I'd forgotten all about these fellows.)

"I only talked to one," said Masters, "an ill-favoured gentleman in a purple suit. The others were in the machine."

"Oh, those," I said. "No, they're not with me. They say they're from Venus."

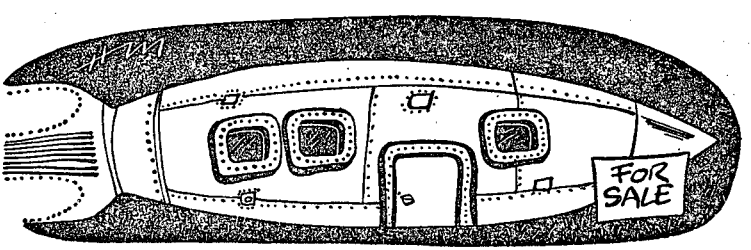
"They're not members of the Angling Association, Mr. Carter."

"No, I know. And they're not staying at the hotel, either."

Masters is a good chap, but he lacks initiative. I could see he didn't know what to do.

"If I were you, Masters," I said, "I'd just tell them politely that the riverside is reserved for the fishermen. We don't want them blundering down to Plane Tree and annoying Mr. Walters, do we? He'll be writing to the secretary again. If they make a fuss, ask to see their licences."

I had hardly finished speaking before I was into a good fish, and in the next hour and a half I landed eight, the heaviest being just short of three pounds — the best basket I have ever made on the Hawther. It drove everything else from my mind, and I couldn't think what Masters was talking about when I saw him later that night at the hotel and he said "They went all right. Told me they quite understood." Then I remembered the strange little adventure, and made a note of it in my fishing diary. It was a remarkable evening for me, and I shall be very much surprised if I ever have another like it, with all this river pollution one reads about nowadays.



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INDEX TO VOLUME SIX — JANUARY 1954–JUNE 1954

ABERNATHY, ROBERT: Axolotl....Jan. 71
The Firefighter....March 78
Heirs Apparent....June 3

ANDERSON, POUL: The Immortal Game....Feb. 115
Ghetto....May 94

ASIMOV, ISAAC: The Fun They Had....Feb. 125

BANKS, RAYMOND E.: Christmas Trombone....Jan. 117

BEAUMONT, CHARLES: The Last Caper....March 49

BENNETT, MARGOT: An Old-Fashioned Poker for My Uncle's Head....May 62

BESTER, ALFRED: 5,271,009....March 3

BOUCHER, ANTHONY: Sriberdegibit.March 95

BRADBURY, RAY: All Summer in a Day....March 122

BRADLEY, MARION ZIMMER: Centaurus Changeling....April 85

BROWN, BILL: Spunk Water....March 39

BUCK, DORIS P.: The Appraiser...Feb. 97

CARLSON, ESTHER: Somewhere East of Rudyard....Feb. 24

CHARTERIS, LESLIE: Fish Story....June 37

CROW, LEVI: Warrior in Darkness.June 53

DEE, ROGER: The Fresh Start....Jan. 83
Man Friday....March 58
The Poundstone Paradox....May 120

DEFORD, MIRIAM ALLEN: Charles Fort: Enfant Terrible of Science (article)....Jan. 105
Mrs. Hink....March 33

DICK, PHILIP K.: The Short Happy Life of the Brown Oxford....Jan. 62

DICKSON, GORDON R.: Miss Prinks....June 22

DRAKE, LEAH BODINE: The Jannigogs (verse)....April 74

ELLIOTT, BRUCE: Wolves Don't Cry....April 75

GALOUYE, DANIEL F.: Sanctuary...Feb. 64

GILBERT, DORIS: Arrangement in Green....Feb. 47

HEINLEIN, ROBERT A.: Star Lummox (part one)....May 3
Star Lummox (part two)....June 79

JACKSON, SHIRLEY: Bulletin....March 46

JAFFRAY, NORMAN R.: Cowboy Lament (verse)....Jan. 93
The Thinker Needs a Wife (verse)....April 71

JENKINS, POWELL JR.: The Mouse With the Twisted Foot....Jan. 97

JENNINGS, DALE: Gingerbread Man....May 74

KEMP, LYSANDER: The Airborne Baserunner....May 77

KORNBLUTH, C. M.: I Never Ast No Favors....April 43

LEIBER, FRITZ: The Silence Game..April 62

MARKS, WINSTON: Call Me Adam..Feb. 101

MCINTOSH, J. T.: One in One Thousand....Jan. 3

MORRISON, WILLIAM: Playground.Feb. 3
Inner Worlds....April 16

NORBERT, W.: The Miracle of the Broom Closet....Feb. 59

NORTON, ANDRE: Mousetrap....June 47

PHILLIPS, PETER: % Mr. Make-peace....Feb. 30

PORGES, ARTHUR: $1.98....May 90

PRIESTLEY, J. B.: The Strange Girl....Jan. 47

REYNOLDS, MACK: The Other Alternative....Feb. 40
And Thou Beside Me....April 56

SHAARA, MICHAEL: Time Payment....June 33

SMITH, EVELYN E.: Gerda....April 124

SPRINGER, SHERWOOD: Epitaph Near Moonport (verse)....Jan. 46

STANTON, Will: The Pioneer....May 66

TENN, WILLIAM: The Tenants....April 3

WAINWRIGHT, RUTH LAURA: Mint, in d/j....June 73

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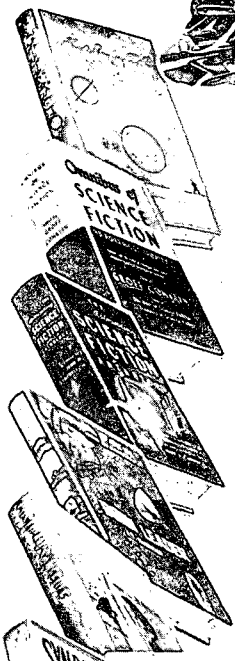

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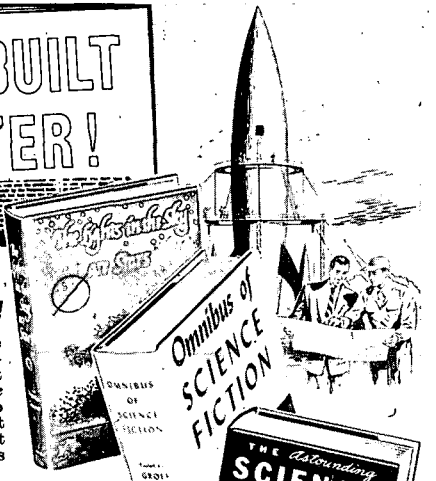

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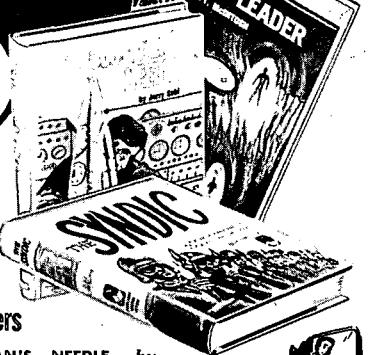

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